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AGNES;
OR
BEAUTY AND PLEASURE.

BY
G. W. M. REYNOLDS.

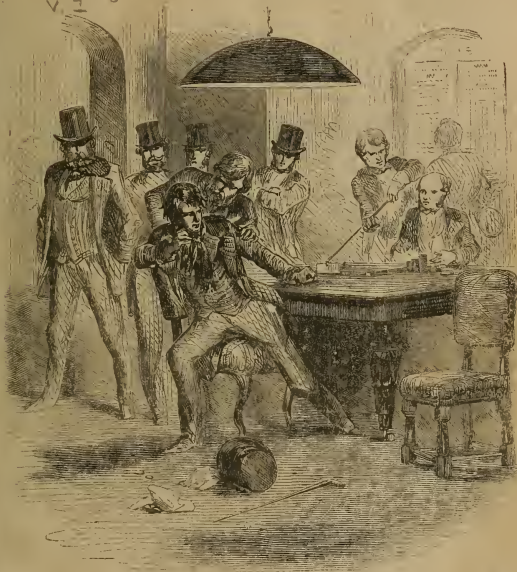
VOL. 1.

AGNES; OR, BEAUTY AND PLEASURE.

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CHAPTER I.

THE GAMBLING HOUSE.

Our tale opens in the month of August, 1829. That annual period of dissipation and gaiety which is called "the London season," had drawn to a close; and all the rank and fashion of the metropolis were hastening out of town. Members of Parliament were throwing aside their senatorial duties to be off to the moors: the gentlemen of No. 1.

the long robe and well-to-do attorneys were released from their professional avocations and setting out on Continental tours or trips to watering-places. The holidays were at hand: for Parliament and Westminster Hall have their breaking-up days, as well as schools—though we much question whether there be so unalloyed a blitheness and so hearty an exuberance of the spirits attendant upon the emancipation of the old boys from the senate and the forum as with the young ones from the desk and the satchel.

The fashionable world was however going out of

town; and from all the mansions of the West End travelling-cha riots and post-cha ises, crowded with a living freightage and cumbered with luggage, were rolling away to country-seats or to favourite sea-side resorts. Marriageable young ladies, who had been whirled and waltzed and quadrilled through the season—but who instead of picking up husbands under the auspices of manoeuvring mammas, had caught only cadaverous complexions—were on their way to woo back the colour to their cheeks amidst a rural atmosphere or in sea-breezes; so that in due time they might return, with a renovated bloom, to plunge anew into London dissipations and cast the matrimonial net once more in the heated, troubled waters where gold and silver fishes were to be caught.

How few of all those denizens of the fashionable world could look back with satisfaction upon the season which was just over! Their existence, instead of having marched with the dignified steps of conscious usefulness, had been partially whirled with feverish rapidity through exciting and wearing dissipations, and had partially dragged itself languidly through pursuits as frivolous as they were enervating. The effects upon health were felt in the fact that those who had worn rouge before, were now compelled to use a deeper tint to cover fresh wrinkles: while those who had hitherto blushed with their natural bloom, were forced to find a substitute in an artificial hue. And with the loss of all that freshness of beauty, was there no impairing of the freshness of the disposition likewise? With the waning of the rose upon the cheeks, was there no withering of all the loveliest flowers of the soul? While wrinkles gathered upon the brow, were there no hard lines impressing themselves upon the heart? Yes: for even the crow's-feet that are traced by dissipation at the corners of Beauty's eyes, are accompanied in their growth by a corresponding warping of the imagination and by a proportionate marring of the purity of the fancy. Beauty enters into fashionable life fair and stainless as the alabaster statue: but after a time she emerges thence like a painted waxen effigy, the picture of everything that is spoilt, tawdry, and meretricious. When the day comes that Beauty finds herself forced to shed the artificial tint of the rose upon her pale and jaded cheeks,—rest assured, gentle reader, that she has arrived at the point when her mind is invested with a corresponding artificiality, and that it is only the outward gloss which conceals the hollowness of the heart within. The Genius of Mischief—a hideous hag who conceals her ugliness under a beautiful mask, and whose spiteful sardonicism is hidden beneath looks of falsest blandishment—sits at an everlasting spinning-wheel, weaving her silken tissue of sin and sorrow for the female votaries of Fashion.

But the season of 1829 was over; and London was going out of town. What food was there for conversation and for scandal during the journey to country-seats and to watering-places!—and how much was there to gossip about until new topics for tittle-tattle, for mysterious confidence, or for bold open slander, should transpire! Who would have thought that Lady So-and-so should have been ruined, and that the bailiffs were in her house at the very time when she gave that last

brilliant party to a thousand guests? Who could have fancied that the proud and brilliant Hon. Miss Such-a-one could have possibly eloped with a penniless eubalturn in the army? And how strange it was that another *belle* of fashion should have gone in the very midst of the season to pass a few months at some country-seat of which no one had ever heard before, and with some old aunt whose existence was apocryphal? And how infamously young Lord So-and-so had behaved in not proposing to Lady Mary after flirting with her throughout the season!—and what a thorough want of taste did the Hon. Augustus Such-a-one display in remaining insensible to the beauty of "mamma's youngest daughter," who had just been brought out! Ah, brought out indeed! Does not the phrase,—shed what gloss upon it you will, or shroud it in phraseology as delicate and as elegantly mystical as possible,—but does it not mean, we ask, in its naked truthfulness, that the young marriageable daughters of fashion are paraded in gilded saloons before the eyes of titled and wealthy bachelors, in the same way that a horse-dealer at his stable leads forth his animals one after another, and makes them exhibit all their best points to the flats whom he is seeking to catch?

Ah! go, then, to your country-seats and to the watering-places, ye votaries of fashion! Carry thither your reminiscences of the season that is just over—your languid memory of its enjoyments and your vivid sense of its disappointments—your recollection of *filles* and waltzes, and your bitter consciousness of blighted hopes and baffled schemings—your gossiping, your scandal, and your slander! Go thither, likewise, to woo from the fresh air some slight renovation of that bloom which has been lost in the heated atmosphere of crowded drawing-rooms!—and peradventure ye may partially succeed. But ye will not win back aught of the genuine freshness of youth—none of that simplicity of mind which began to depart in the very first hour that a masculine arm encircled your waist in the voluptuous dance, and that masculine eyes looked down with libertine hardihood into your own: ye will not find either at country-seats or watering-places the rejuvenescing springs of those generous impulses of character which have been subdued or crushed beneath the weight of the gems and jewels which decked you for the saloons of fashion;—and if you dare look down deep into your own hearts, you cannot shut out from yourselves the conviction that ye have been rendered altered beings by the ordeal of a London season. A mother's pride, as false as it is frivolous—a dandy's idle flattery—a fop's silly compliment—or an abigail's hollow sycophantic adulation, may tell you, young Beauty! that you are marvellously improved since you escaped from school-girl restraints and entered the great world as a lady of fashion. You may be told that in dress you have acquired a tasteful elegance—that the dance has taught you to step with graceful ease—that you have a statueque carriage of the head and bust—that your conversation has gained a captivating charm—and that your manners have acquired an aristocratic polish: but pause and ask yourself whether in point of real and veritable attractiveness you have gained by exchanging the genuine gushing freshness of the youthful feelings for the artificial

frivolities of fashion. No longer possessing your own artless candour, you mistrust the words and the actions of all who are brought in contact with you: you plunge with false excitement into pleasure, having lost the naturally buoyant spirit which gave its healthful charm to innocent recreation: you are no longer willing to put favourable interpretations upon words, nor generous constructions upon actions: you listen with incredulity even to the sublimest truths, should they happen to be told you: you look without a sincere admiration upon things that are really admirable;—and if you should chance to become the victim of calamity or wrong-doing, it does not render you charitable to the misfortunes, to the sufferings, or the frailties of others. Not—for you are an altered being: your mind is warped, your imagination is led astray, and your fancy is fevered by the sinister influences of that idol of fashion at whose shrine you have become a votary.

It was the beginning of the month of August, in the year 1829, as we have already said,—when, a little after eight o'clock in the evening, a young gentleman issued from the coffee-room of a fashionable West End Hotel, where he had been dining. He was about twenty-three years of age—tall and well made. Without being handsome, he might be termed good-looking; for the slight flush of wine that was now upon his countenance concealed the traces of dissipation which would have otherwise been apparent. His hair was dark: he had fine eyes, but somewhat thickly pencilled brows—a rather large mouth, but a very good set of teeth. He was dressed with considerable elegance; and though there was a certain air of the libertine about him, yet his bearing and his manners bespoke him to be, by social position, a gentleman.

Pausing for an instant upon the threshold of the hotel, he yawned and looked languidly up and down the street, as if at a loss what next to do with himself. And such was the fact. The breaking-up of the season had just taken his usual companions out of town—while he, for a very good reason, was compelled to remain in London. In truth, he had no country-seat of his own, nor any wealthy friends who appeared to esteem him sufficiently to invite him to one: while his purse was too slender and his resources too much exhausted to enable him to stand the expenditure of a watering-place. He was almost ashamed at being seen alone, as it were, in London when all the fashionable world had left it: but necessity left him not a choice—there was no help for it—and at the hotel he had hinted, as if in a casual way, in the presence of the waiters, that pressing business connected with a legacy just left him, compelled him, to his disgust and annoyance, to remain for the present in the capital.

The tale of the legacy was however a little fiction, which served a double purpose—in the first place accounting for his unfashionable presence in London when the season was over; and in the second place enabling the young gentleman to add the cost of his dinner to the already somewhat lengthy bill standing against him at the establishment. The hotel-keeper and the waiters however had full confidence in him; for during the past two or three years he had expended considerable

sums at the house; and according to all outward appearance he was still in the same affluent circumstances as ever.

But how deceptive are such appearances! A man may continue to dress well, display a watch-chain festooning over his waistcoat, smoke his cigars, wear lemon-coloured kid gloves, and drop in with half-a-dozen “young gentlemen about town” to dine off turtle and venison at an hotel, without in reality having any of his once good fortune left. And such was precisely the case with Morton Evelyn—the young gentleman of whom we are speaking.

Not that he was utterly penniless: for in his pocket-book he possessed bank-notes to the extent of about fifty or sixty pounds—the remnant of the last five hundred which he had sold out of the Bank of England. He could thus have paid for his dinner if he thought fit: but it would have seemed odd to settle for a single repast when he owed for twenty or thirty; and moreover it was against his system to pay where he might obtain credit.

He lounged along the street, wondering partially what he should do with himself to while away two or three hours until it was time to return home to his lodgings—and wondering partially what he should do for the means of existence at all, when the contents of his pocket-book were exhausted. He strolled into Regent Street; and if there were fewer fashionable loungers in that favourite evening resort, there were quite as many unfortunate females as usual. Evelyn scarcely glanced at the flaunting creatures, with their painted cheeks, and their hollow eyes that cast forth enticing looks: he was too much accustomed to the scene to find any novelty in it. Presently however he found his attention gradually settling upon a young girl, who, though plying the trade of infamy, yet seemed to be new at it: for there was no wanton hardihood in her looks—no paint upon her cheeks: she had not lost all the first freshness of her youthful beauty: there was neatness and no tawdriness in her attire; and she appeared even to shrink from public notice rather than to court it. Morton Evelyn lingered to watch her for a little while; and as the blaze from a shop window streamed full upon her countenance, he saw that there was a shadow of despair upon it. Though not much given to moral reflections, it struck him that there was the element of sincere penitence in that young soul, if a philanthropic hand were stretched forth to drag her up from the abyss of degradation and infamy into which she had sunk down. He looked at her again: he contemplated her more attentively; her countenance, naturally of an exceeding beauty, appeared to show that the heart-break had begun;—and Morton, touched by the spectacle, hurried onward to escape from it.

But the despairing, anguished face of that unfortunate girl, haunted him as he continued his way; and he thought to himself, “Well, after all, I shall not be much the poorer if I give her a trifle.”

He retraced his steps: he could not immediately discern her amidst the gay flaunting tribe that thronged the street; and a pang like that of a remorse struck to his heart for not having immediately relieved her. But all of a sudden he

caught a glimpse of her round the corner of a narrow diverging street: she had evidently retired thither into the comparative obscurity, to drag her load of grief away from the more brilliantly lighted thoroughfare in which it seemed to be so out of place and where it attracted so little sympathy. She was leaning against a doorway, as if to support herself: and Morton Evelyn beheld her raise her hand and press it to her brow, as if to soothe that dull aching which despair had infused into her very blood, and which she was not yet sufficiently profligate to dispel by means of the excitement of strong drink.

"My poor girl, you are ill," said Morton Evelyn, accosting her: for he did not like to say, "You are unhappy;"—he meant to relieve her, but he did not want to elicit a tale of sorrow which might be true or might be false.

"Ill?" echoed the girl, recovering herself with a sudden start. "Oh no, sir! I am not ill. I——" and then she burst into tears.

"Come, come," said Morton, "do not give way to grief! We shall be noticed—and that will be devilish inconvenient. People will take me for a fool or a milkop."

But even as that dissipated young man of pleasure thus spoke, he felt that his eyes were growing dim with a moisture of which he was half ashamed; and he hastily drew forth his purse. In one end were two or three shillings in silver: in the other was a five-pound note. He did not like to offer the girl the silver; and he could not afford to part with the bank-note. For an instant he thought of entering a shop to ask for change: but his pride was conflicting with his better feelings; and he had a horrible dread of being noticed and taken for a spooney who was being cajoled by a syren trickster. He hesitated—and again looked in the girl's countenance. She was now weeping softly: the sympathy which she had elicited had evidently proved a balm to her poor wounded heart. "How came you reduced to this?" suddenly asked Morton Evelyn, forgetting his previous intention not to tarry to elicit a tale.

The girl's narrative was brief. Her name was Lucy Maitland: she had been seduced from a comfortable home in the country, under a promise of marriage—she was brought up to London, where she was abandoned by her seducer: she had become destitute—and the landlady of her lodgings had bidden her go earn money in the streets, or else return not thither again. The narrative was told with a mingled pathos and artlessness, as well as with so profound a mournfulness, that Morton Evelyn felt convinced it was true, notwithstanding his general incredulity in such matters. He hesitated no longer: he placed the five-pound note in her hand, and was hurrying away, ashamed lest he should be seen in the performance of so good an action.

But he had not sped many paces, when a gentle hand was laid upon his arm; and the low musical voice of the girl was breathing in his ear.

"Pardon me for detaining you, sir," she said with the deepest emotion: "but, Oh! you know not what you have done! You have saved me—I feel convinced you have saved me!"—and now her accents were full of a grateful exultation. "I beseech you to tell me your name, that I may remember it in my prayers!"

Morton Evelyn, being but little of a religious turn of mind, was on the point of sending forth from his lips the light laugh of scorn,—when, as he flung his glance upon the girl's countenance, he beheld something so unmistakably sincere in its expression, so holy even in its fervid gratitude, that the laugh was hushed upon his lips; and with a feeling of piety such as he had never experienced before, he said, "My poor girl, if it please you to know my name for such a kind purpose, it is Morton Evelyn."

"I shall never forget it!" were the touchingly emphatic words which Lucy Maitland spoke in response; and there was likewise something solemnly sincere in her accents and her looks.

The next instant she glided away—not back into the brilliantly lighted street, but along the obscurer one, as if glad to escape from the former thoroughfare where women made a market of their charms.

"I wonder whether it was all true?" said Morton Evelyn to himself, as he returned into the Quadrant: but though he thus mused inwardly, there was the conviction in his heart that the tale was true; and to his credit we must add that he did not regret the noble bounty which indeed he could so ill afford.

The scene had left upon his mind a certain impression—almost a dispiriting one—which he was anxious to shake off. Therefore again with renewed force recurred the question—What was he to do to while away the time? Almost unwittingly his steps were bent towards a closed door over which a brilliant lamp was burning; and then he suddenly stopped short, saying to himself with a species of shudder, "No—not here!"

It was a gambling-house at the door of which he had for an instant halted, and whence he now turned away. In that den Morton Evelyn had lost a considerable portion of the fortune which he had inherited on coming of age two years back, and which, as the reader has seen, was now reduced to all that he had about him. He walked on, struggling against his inclinations to seek the gaming-table. His moral courage was every moment giving way, until at length he found himself musing in this strain:—

"I have about fifty or sixty pounds left; and it must all go shortly. Then what is to become of me? May I not as well endeavour to convert it into five or six hundred? They say that luck changes when fortune is at the lowest ebb. I cannot always be a loser; and even if I did lose everything to-night, it would only be accelerating the position in which I must inevitably be placed in the course of a few weeks: whereas, on the other hand, it is quite possible I may come out of the gambling-house with enough to carry me on for a twelvemonth in the comparatively quiet way in which I am now living."

The reader has seen that with all his extravagance, his dissipation, his lax principles, and his false pride, Morton Evelyn was not utterly deficient in good feelings: but he wanted the stamina—the moral courage—which would have made him a better man and a more useful member of society. In the present instance his want of resolution prevailed; and he entered the gambling-house.

In the room to which he ascended, there was

the usual scene—a table covered with green baize, the *croupiers* sitting with their rakes, one of them having before him a tin-box containing the notes and gold which constituted “the bank.” Eight or ten persons were seated at play—most of them being dissipated and decayed members of the fashionable world, who, like Morton Evelyn, had not the means of going out of town, and were equally ready with excuses to account for their unfashionable presence in London. With most of them Mr. Evelyn was acquainted; and after some little conversation, he sat down to play.

For a while fortune seemed in Evelyn’s favour; and the contents of his pocket-book were doubled. He became exhilarated: he felt convinced that at last his luck had turned; and he played more boldly. His hope was however disappointed: the tide set in against him: he drank wine—he grew desperate—he would not believe that this night was to witness the confirmation of his ruin—until his last bank-note was swept away by the *croupier’s* rake.

Then Morton Evelyn became almost wild with despair; and the pride which had made him so much dread lest his generous sympathy for a fellow-creature’s misfortunes should be observed, did not prevent him from giving way to loudly uttered maledictions upon his own folly. But there was no sympathy for him in that den where blacklegs and sharpers and fallen gentlemen congregated. The game continued: Morton Evelyn remained almost unnoticed; and throwing himself upon a chair, he looked the picture of ruin itself. His dark hair was all tossing in disorder above the countenance from which the flush of wine had passed away, leaving it deadly pale: his features were rigid—his brows were corrugated—and one clenched fist rested upon the table, while the other hand supported his head. Thus, for some minutes he remained motionless as a statue—but with a sinister light in his eyes, as if the brain in its despair were revolving projects of suicide.

Suddenly Morton Evelyn started up—dashed his hat upon his head—rudely repulsed a couple of “kind friends” who, having profited by his losses, begged him to remain to supper—and rushed forth from the gambling-house. There was a hearty laugh on the part of those whom he left behind: but he heard it not—or at least did not heed it.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHURCH-VAULT.

MORTON EVELYN did not live at the hotel where he had dined. For purposes of economy, and that he might be the better able to maintain a good appearance out of doors, he had for some months past occupied a cheap lodging in one of those pleasant little villa-residences which even at the date whereof we are writing were springing up in every suburb of the metropolis. Thitherward he now bent his way—on foot—for the expense of a hired vehicle would have denuded him of his last shilling.

It was a considerable distance from the scene of his fatal losses that Morton Evelyn was thus con-

strained to walk: for the villa where he dwelt was quite on the outskirts, and might almost be said to stand in the open country. With feverish brain and with a sad tightness at the heart, the ruined gamester proceeded on his way. He strode with a rapidity which was akin to the excitement of his feelings: he took no note of any objects which he passed: it was rather by instinct than by actual observation that he pursued the proper route.

At length he was in the outskirts: the air seemed purer and fresher: it fanned his cheek—it cooled his brain. He relaxed his pace: his thoughts grew more collected: he was becoming accustomed to the conviction that he was an utterly ruined man. Now he looked about him to see exactly where he was; and at the same instant a neighbouring church-clock began proclaiming the hour of midnight. There was a short cut through the churchyard; and Morton proceeded to take it;—for though it was one of those isolated and lonely churches which might have been seen at the time in certain suburbs of the metropolis, before the enterprise of builders and the requirements of a growing population hemmed them in with houses,—Evelyn had no tinge of superstitious fear in his character.

It was rather a dark night—but yet not so completely obscure as to prevent some of the most recently raised tombstones from gleaming white and ghastly above the resting-places of the dead. The last sounds of the clock had died vibrantly away into the silence of the place and the hour; and the very atmosphere itself seemed to sleep more heavily over the graves of the departed, than elsewhere.

Morton was pursuing his way, when it suddenly struck him that he beheld a light flashing for an instant through a little window that was on a level with the ground, and which belonged to the vaults beneath the church. The light however had instantaneously disappeared; and Evelyn thought that it must have been mere fancy on his part. He was again walking onward along the narrow path which intersected the church-yard, when he beheld the light again, and again did it as quickly disappear. Thoughts of resurrection-men swept through his brain; and he was on the point of shouting out to raise an alarm—for there were three or four houses within earshot—when it struck him that the officials of the church might be possibly engaged in preparing a vault for the reception of some member of the family to which it belonged. Still he had a strange feeling of curiosity about him on the point: he had no superstitious terror; and perhaps, likewise, he was in that mood when a person clutches at any adventure that may divert the thoughts from a painful topic. Be all this as it may,—certain it is that Morton Evelyn crept stealthily towards the little window, and listened. There was no glass to that window—merely a range of iron bars. He could hear voices speaking in a half-subdued tone; and he distinctly caught these words, “Now, sexton, what have we here? This plate upon the coffin-
lid—”

“Pray be more cautious, sir, how you throw the light from the lantern,” replied another voice, “or it may be seen outside.”

“Yes, yes—I’ll take care!” responded the first speaker. “After all, there is no harm in what we

are doing—it is perfectly legitimate—a mere research—”

“I’m not quite so sure that there’s no harm in ’t, Mr. Waldron,” interrupted the sexton: and he went on speaking—but Morton Evelyn could no longer catch the words that he uttered.

Waldron!—that name was familiar to his ears: or at least he had some slight acquaintance with a person who bore it. And that it was the same individual, too, of whom he was thinking, he felt convinced from the tones of his voice. Mr. Waldron was a lawyer; and Evelyn fancied, from certain circumstances, that he could possibly conjecture the motive of his being in a church-vault at such an hour and evidently in a stealthy manner.

Evelyn at once passed on to the nearest door of the church; and he found that it was closed, but unlocked. He unhesitatingly entered, and began groping his way towards the door communicating with the vaults, which he happened to know was situated on the ground floor of the tower, for he had once out of curiosity looked into that church. At the very instant he reached the threshold, he heard footsteps ascending; and he therefore waited until Mr. Waldron and the sexton emerged from below. The latter now carried the lantern, which only shed a thin streak of light—for to this extent was it darkened.

“Don’t be alarmed, Mr. Waldron,” said the intruder. “It is I—Morton Evelyn.”

“Evelyn?” ejaculated the sexton in a voice of terror. “Why, that’s the very vault—”

“Hush!” said Mr. Waldron: and stepping forth from within the low arched door, he asked, “Why, good heavens, Mr. Evelyn! what brings you hither?”

“A mere accident,” replied Morton. “I live in this neighbourhood—I saw a light flashing through the vault-window—and so, inspired by curiosity—”

“Well, well,” interjected Mr. Waldron, who was evidently rendered somewhat nervous by the incident: “there is no harm done. Of course you will say nothing about it? You may guess that I am continuing my researches—”

“Yea—I comprehend! Indeed, I thought as much!” replied Morton. “But the sexton said something—in a word, Mr. Waldron, do you think—have you any reason to suppose that these researches of your’s may possibly, after all, regard me?—for never was there a man who stood more in need of some hopeful promise than I do at this instant!”

Morton had been hurried along by the excitement of his feelings,—and also by certain recollections of the circumstances which had first made him acquainted with Joshua Waldron, the lawyer,—thus to give excited utterance to those thoughts wherein hopes and fears were blended.

“Hush!—not another word now, Mr. Evelyn!” said Waldron. “But call upon me to-morrow as early as you like—say ten o’clock—”

“I will! I will!” responded the ruined gamester, with the anxious suspense of a partial hope. “But tell me,” he added in a whisper,—“just one word—only one word!—dare I expect—”

“I really can say nothing now,” interrupted Waldron. “I have been taking notes of the names upon certain coffin-lids down below; and I

cannot judge of their importance until I compare them with other dates and particulars which I have at home. But come to me to-morrow—and we will talk the matter over.”

Though there were many reasons why Morton Evelyn should not entertain the wild hope which had sprung up in his mind,—yet in proportion to the desperation of one’s circumstances, does hope itself become extravagant. This is human nature; and Morton Evelyn was no exception to the rule. It was the dawning man suddenly clutching at a straw. In his enthusiasm Evelyn grasped the lean hand of the lawyer,—who was a thin, elderly, sharp-featured little man: and he then rushed out of the church.

It was in a species of intoxication that Evelyn reeled rather than walked home to his humble lodging. He would not listen to the suggestions of his own reason: he would not suffer himself to look upon the dark and dubious side of the picture; the bright one completely dazzled his imagination. From utter obscurity, his world’s pathway seemed to be suddenly lifted into the blaze of a glorious light. In this frame of mind was it that he reached the little villa-residence; and when seeking his couch, he lay awake, reveling in a thousand wild fancies—abandoning himself to hopes and visions of the most fantastic character. At length slumber stole upon his eyes; and the same subjects grew all the more wild and fantastic in the real dreams of sleep.

When he awoke in the morning, his thoughts were somewhat more sobered down; and he reflected that, after all, he had given way to too much enthusiastic credulity to the delicious whisperings of hope, and that he ought to have weighed the thousand chances existing against the realization of any such brilliant visions. Still, let the reader understand, Mr. Evelyn was far from being depressed, and that he cherished a vague idea that the encounter with the lawyer would not turn out altogether to his disadvantage. Thus meditating, he dressed himself—partook of his breakfast—and having finished by nine o’clock, had a full hour before him to walk the distance to Mr. Waldron’s office.

This office was situated in Lincoln’s Inn Fields: but Mr. Waldron’s private house was in Russell Square. We have already said that the lawyer was an elderly, thin, sharp-featured man: we may now add that he had a cadaverous countenance, but piercing restless eyes that seemed capable of looking one through and through. He was a widower, and had two children—both grown-up daughters, of whom we shall presently have to speak. His chambers indicated the attorney in good practice. They were on the ground-floor of one of those large old-fashioned houses in Lincoln’s Inn Fields which at no very far-back date were the mansions of the British aristocracy. The house where the name of Joshua Waldron appeared upon the panel just within the doorway, contained large rooms with enormous mantels and heavy cornices—and a wide staircase, with gigantic balustrades on which the hand could only rest, but could not possibly grasp. Mr. Waldron’s front office had a double desk placed at the windows,—what may be termed the gable of the desk being surmounted by a dingy brass framework, sustaining huge ledgers and large

books, which were handy there for the clerks, who sat on either side. Of these underlings there were three—a chief clerk, a copying clerk, and an out-door clerk.

The first was an elderly man, rejoicing in the name of Timperley, and who in personal appearance was not very much unlike his master—except that instead of having merely a sharp, shrewd, and business-like expression of countenance, he had a sinister one. It was from beneath his shaggy overhanging brows that he looked at any one with whom he was conversing; but even this look was askeance—and it was always furtively withdrawn if such person happened to gaze intently upon Mr. Timperley himself. It was whispered that he had once been an attorney in good practice—but that either having been struck off the rolls for some misdeed, or through having dwindled down into a poverty that prevented him from taking out a certificate, he was compelled to accept the post of clerk in the office of Mr. Waldron.

The out-door clerk was the best-dressed of the three; and had a certain dashing air of gentility about him; so that what with his gold chain, his well-polished boots, and the new coat which, when in-doors, he kept carefully folded up in his desk, he was a very respectable representative of the establishment of Joshua Waldron when attending in the Nisi Prius Courts, or occasionally when lunching with a bankrupt whom he was taking through the Court in Basinghall Street. As for the copying clerk, he was a middle-aged man in a suit of seedy black, and a dingy white neckcloth with lump ends; so that he might be mistaken for a decayed methodist person. He had a very large family; and as he was very often drunk, his wife—a poor sickly woman, in a scanty shawl, and generally with a child in her arms—might of a Saturday evening be seen hanging about in the neighbourhood of the office, to intercept her husband and his salary, lest he should slip off to the Brown Boar and expend three parts of his earnings.

Such were the components of Mr. Waldron's front office: but his own private room was fitted up in a style where the handsome and the business-like might seem to blend. Thus the substantial chairs of Russia leather were encumbered with papers: numerous documents, apparently having fallen by accident from the writing-table, were strewn upon the rich carpet: the glass doors of the book-case, containing a splendid law-library, were for the most part swinging negligently open; and there was such a pile of correspondence in front of the attorney himself, that an innocent-minded visitor would be lost in wonderment how he could ever find time to get through it.

Punctually at five minutes to ten Mr. Waldron arrived at his office: and punctually at ten o'clock Morton Evelyn made his appearance. To his inquiry in the clerks' room whether Mr. Waldron were within, he received an affirmative reply from Mr. Timperley, who ushered him into the inner office. Mr. Waldron now assumed a more reserved and business-like air than he had worn on the previous night when caught in the act of issuing from the vaults of the suburban church; and without proffering his hand, he made a motion for his visitor to be seated.

"Let me see, Mr. Evelyn?" he said, lying back

in his own chair, with his pen behind his right ear and his thumbs caught in the arm-holes of his waistcoat: "I think that when you and I met before—I do not allude to last night, you know——"

"I will explain exactly how it was, sir," interrupted Morton, but with a certain air of deference and respect towards one who he believed might possibly become the arbiter of his destinies. "It was about a year ago—I received a letter from you requesting me to call, as you fancied that you had a clue to some business which would be to my advantage. I came accordingly. You asked me who my father was, and who my grandfather. I told you. You then questioned me concerning the relatives or progenitors of my grandfather: but I was unable to give you any information on those points."

"And why were you thus unable?" asked Mr. Waldron.

"I explained the reasons at the time, sir," responded Evelyn. "My father was a Liverpool merchant; and in that town he died when I was only twelve years of age. My mother had been dead since my childhood: my paternal grandfather died before I was born. Thus you see, sir, that I was left an orphan at too early an age to have heard much about the family to which I belonged—or at least to have remembered whatever I might have heard. At my father's death I was sent to school in the neighbourhood of London; and thence to college till I came of age. One of my guardians died before I had attained my majority—the other shortly afterwards. I do not know of a single relative that I possess in the whole world; and thus you see, sir, the information I was enabled to give you in respect to my family when you sent for me a twelvemonth ago, was of a sufficiently meagre description."

"Have you any armorial bearings accompanied by a pedigree?" inquired Mr. Waldron.

"To speak the truth," responded Morton Evelyn, "I have not. My family was simply a mercantile one——"

"And what did I say to you at the time you called upon me a twelvemonth back?" demanded Mr. Waldron, who listened with an inscrutable expression of countenance to all that his visitor was telling him.

"You gave me to understand, sir," replied Morton Evelyn, who was now upon the tauter-hooks of suspense, "that you had a clue to a considerable fortune—and even to something besides—but which you did not specify——"

"Go on," said Mr. Waldron curtly.

"You proceeded to intimate," continued Morton, "that all these advantages rightfully belonged to some family bearing the name of Evelyn—that you had expended thousands and wasted whole years in the search after the lawful heir——"

"But what did I say to you in respect to your own chances?" demanded Mr. Waldron. "The fact is, I have seen so many Evelyns upon the subject, that unless you assist me with explanations of what occurred in your own particular case, I shall be jumbling and confounding matters—though my head is generally pretty clear on most occasions."

"You bade me, sir, ascertain who my grandfather's father was," responded Morton. "I went

to Liverpool and made inquiries: but it appeared that he had not settled there until he was thirty years of age—and no one knew anything of his antecedents. Then I advertised in the newspapers, offering a reward for the baptismal certificate of Andrew Evelyn——”

“That was your grandfather?” interjected Mr. Waldron inquiringly.

“Yes—my grandfather,” answered Morton; “because, you know, if I had been fortunate enough to find that certificate, it would have informed me of the names of his parents.”

“And the result of your advertisements?” asked the lawyer.

“They were fruitless,” rejoined Evelyn. “I came and reported all these things to you, sir; and you then told me that you were sorry I had taken so much trouble and gone to such an expense—for that, after all, you did not think I could possibly belong to the family to which you had alluded.”

“And therefore,” said Mr. Waldron, “you thought no more of the matter—you took no further steps—and you let it slip out of your thoughts?”

“That is the exact truth, sir,” responded Morton. “I totally lost sight of the subject until last night,—when passing through the church-yard, I heard you speaking in the vault. Then it instantaneously struck me that you must be prosecuting your researches——”

“True!” said Mr. Waldron, now suffering himself to smile: “for you knew very well that I could not be a resurrection-man. And what then?”

“When the sexton mentioned the name of Evelyn in connexion with that vault,” answered Morton, “I confess that a wild hope sprang up within me——”

“And why should you have entertained such a hope?” asked the lawyer. “Have you the slightest reason to suppose that any of your ancestors were interred in London?”

“No particular reason, sir. Only,” added Morton, with a smile, “I must have had ancestors, and they must have been buried somewhere. And then, too, I will admit that last night——”

“I have not forgotten the words you addressed to me,” interrupted Mr. Waldron. “You were in such a condition that no man living ever stood more in need of a hopeful promise than you did last night. Such was your statement. Explain it.”

“It may be all summed up in a few words, sir,” answered Morton: and then, after a moment’s pause, he added, with a partly mournful, partly excited emphasis, “I am penniless!”

“Humph!” said Mr. Waldron: and his thumbs, quitting his waistcoat armholes, his hands dived down into his breeches pockets, as if it were the instinctive movement of one who could thank God that he was not penniless. “In a word, Mr. Evelyn, you have run through all your fortune—you have no profession nor trade—the friends whom you have hitherto found, are unable or unwilling to assist you—and, in plain terms, you know not exactly what to do. Have I guessed rightly?”

“You have, sir—God knows that you have!” exclaimed Morton. “I have been exceedingly foolish—very, very silly——”

“The past cannot be recalled—but it may be atoned for,” interjected Mr. Waldron. “From those coffin-like last night I gained some little information—but still comparatively nothing to speak of. Nevertheless, I think that this information may have afforded me a clue, which must be followed up. Now mind, Mr. Evelyn—I do not want to excite any wild hopes—compose yourself—give not way to excitement—but I think it is possible—nay, even probable, that you may be the lawful heir to this great wealth—and—and—to something more——But no matter!”

“Oh, my dear sir!” exclaimed Morton, all his hope reviving: “what joyous tidings——”

“There now! you are exciting yourself! Be calm, sir. I am going to summon my head clerk. I desire that you will be collected before him:—” and Mr. Waldron spoke almost stertily; but yet it was with a sort of friendly or even paternal sternness, as if with the best possible intentions he sought to curb the wild flights of the young man’s imagination.

“I will be calm, sir!” said Morton, exercising a strong effort over his own feelings.

Mr. Waldron now summoned his head clerk, who came bowing obsequiously into the private room.

“Timperley,” said Mr. Waldron, “in that affair of the Evelyn family, you know—I think that this gentleman here has a very good chance.—Please be quiet, sir!” he added aside to Morton, who was on the point of bounding from his seat at those hopeful words.

“Indeed, sir,” answered Timperley, with the air of a man who was not at all astonished at what he heard, but who awaited further explanations.

“Yes,” continued Mr. Waldron; “I think that Mr. Morton Evelyn has a very fair chance. He has done me the honour of appointing me his solicitor in the business; and you will draw up an agreement, Timperley, according to the terms of which Mr. Evelyn guarantees to me twenty per cent. on all moneys that I may succeed in recovering for him. Is it not so, Mr. Evelyn?”

Though Morton had really assented to nothing of the sort, yet he was only too glad to proclaim a prompt affirmative; and Timperley again bowed obsequiously.

“Mr. Evelyn has given me the requisite instructions how to proceed,” continued Waldron; “and in the present situation of affairs I cannot have the slightest objection to advance Mr. Evelyn such sums as he may require for his immediate use. Draw a bill of exchange, Timperley, and fill up a warrant-of-attorney, for five hundred pounds.—Pray be seated, my dear sir!” blandly added the lawyer, turning towards Morton, who was again on the point of springing from his seat.

Timperley bowed and withdrew; and Waldron said, “Pray, Mr. Evelyn, do not give way to this excitement. I have not told you that you are the rightful heir—I am not sure that you are—but I think that your chance is just sufficiently good to warrant me in running some risks. I am going to fill you up a cheque for five hundred pounds. I hope you will live with suitable economy—but still in a manner becoming your station; and if you will dine with me at five o’clock this evening, I shall be happy to see you. You will find nobody at



my house in Russell Square except my younger daughter and myself;—and over a glass of claret in the evening you and I can talk more upon these matters. By the by, we will try the advertisements again. While I fill up the cheque, do you draw up the advertisement, offering fifty guineas reward to the person who shall supply the baptismal certificate of the deceased Andrew Evelyn, merchant of Liverpool; and put in the years about which, according to your idea, he must have been born. Wind it up by desiring that the information may be addressed either to yourself or to your solicitor—naming me."

Morton was only too glad to fulfil instructions which seemed so fraught with business-like promise: and in drawing up the advertisement, he did not give his address at his own lodgings, but at the hotel where he was accustomed to dine. The cheque was written: Mr. Timperley returned

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into the private room, with the bill of exchange, the warrant-of-attorney, and the agreement,—which last-mentioned document was to the effect of making over to Mr. Joshua Waldron twenty per cent on all sums that through his agency should be recovered for Morton Evelyn.

"As for this bill and warrant-of-attorney," said Mr. Waldron, with a careless smile, "I shall never think of asking you for the five hundred pounds or any other moneys that I may advance, unless I succeed in carrying out the business with which you have been kind enough to entrust me. Not another word, my dear sir!—but be so kind as to sign those documents; for my time is valuable;"—and Mr. Waldron lugged up a huge gold watch from the depths of his fob.

Morton hastened with enthusiastic alacrity to sign the different documents. Mr. Timperley obsequiously showing him where he was to affix his

signature. The old clerk then retired; and Mr. Waldron said, "Here is your cheque, Mr. Evelyn. Do not be too extravagant—but on the other hand do not hesitate to make me your banker for the supply of your moderate wants. Ah! by the bye, as you have less to do than I have, you may as well take this advertisement of yours to the *Times* newspaper office; and pay for half-a-dozen insertions."

"My dear sir," said the overjoyed Morton, "I have not words sufficient——"

"Enough, Mr. Evelyn!" interrupted Waldron. "At five o'clock punctually I shall expect you in Russell Square."

The attorney shook Morton by the hand; and the latter issued from the office with a brain so exultant that he felt as if he were intoxicated, and the whole of Lincoln's Inn Fields seemed to be turning round. A cab was passing; he jumped into it, and drove straight to the banker's. There he procured cash for his cheque; and thence he proceeded to the newspaper office, where he paid for the insertion of the advertisement. Confident that he should inherit an immense fortune—and believing that Waldron knew more respecting the validity of his claims than he had in the first instance chosen to admit—Morton lost no time in removing from his lodgings at the suburban villa-residence to a handsome suite of apartments which he hired in a fashionable quarter of the West End. He then dressed for dinner,—all these proceedings having occupied the day; and punctually at five o'clock he knocked at the door of Mr. Waldron's handsome house in Russell Square.

CHAPTER III.

HONORIA WALDRON.

DURING his ride thither, Morton Evelyn had been busy in speculating upon the entertainment he should receive, the additional information he might obtain from Waldron's lips in respect to the *one* grand topic, and also what might be the appearance of the lawyer's younger daughter. Morton could not help thinking that if there were the least family resemblance, Miss Waldron must be a thin, hatchet-faced, rixenish-looking young lady, with a lean figure. Indeed, he came to the conclusion that he had thus pretty accurately depicted the portraiture of the lady whom he was about to meet.

A footman in a handsome livery escorted Morton Evelyn up a well-carpeted staircase to the drawing-room,—on entering which the visitor was received by Mr. Waldron, who hastened forward to welcome him with cordiality. At the same time a tall, handsome, elegantly dressed young lady, about twenty years of age, rose up from the sofa; and the lawyer said, "Permit me, Mr. Evelyn, to introduce you to my daughter, Miss Waldron."

Morton was for an instant smitten with astonishment: but with the well-bred ease which he possessed, he quickly recovered himself—bowed to the lady—and at once glided into that light common-place conversation which a man of the world

always has ready at his command. Miss Waldron welcomed her father's guest with a sufficient degree of affability, though there was naturally something reserved and dignified, if not absolutely haughty, in her disposition and manner. In respect to her personal appearance, she had light hair flowing in ringlets upon shoulders which the low evening-toilet completely exposed, and which were of dazzling whiteness. Indeed, her complexion was exquisitely fair; for her beauty was that of a perfect *blonde*. Her large blue eyes denoted strength of mind and firmness of purpose, rather than feminine gentleness and soft serenity of character. Her countenance was an oval, terminating in a sensuously rounded chin: her profile was equiline; and the full lips of luscious redness enhanced the voluptuousness of her general expression. The face was however a very fine one—striking and handsome. The neck was faultless in its modelling and its snowy whiteness: but it wanted the swan-like curvature to render its carriage completely graceful. It seemed to be an alabaster column gradually spreading out at its base, and expanding into the noble foundation of a magnificent bust. Indeed her figure was somewhat on a large scale, with full and well-developed contours, but yet not bordering on an *embonpoint* too luxuriant for perfection of symmetry, elegance of motion, or lightness of step. Her arms, bare to the shoulders, were robust, yet sculptured to an exactness of proportion in reference to the entire shape; while the folds of her dress defined the sweeping length of the lower limbs. She had a fine set of teeth: her hands, though of a plumpness corresponding with the general fulness of her formation, were well-shaped,—her fingers tapering even beautifully. Thus, altogether, Miss Waldron was a very handsome young woman, though of a style of beauty that seemed to appeal rather to the sense than the sentiment.

Morton Evelyn was, as we have seen, astonished on beholding so handsome a person in Mr. Waldron's younger daughter; and he could not prevent his looks from expressing admiration. She was lady-like in her manners, notwithstanding that tincture of reserve and haughtiness to which we have alluded; and she assuredly had no affectation nor frivolity about her. We have already hinted that her mind was somewhat masculine; and Morton soon found that she had a pretty general knowledge of the routine of law-business, as well as a good insight into her father's affairs. At the dinner-table she enacted the part of a hostess with all possible propriety,—just pressing her hospitality far enough to show the guest that he was welcome, without however approaching the vulgar extreme of endeavouring to force him to partake of this or that dish after he had once declined.

When Miss Waldron had retired, Morton Evelyn expected that the lawyer would enter into particulars with regard to the one grand topic which so deeply interested him: but though Waldron speedily touched upon it, and even conversed thereon at length, it was like dealing with generalities. He entered not into details—he played as it were around the topic. He intimated, for example, that he had been on various occasions successful in similar affairs; that he had recovered

unclaimed dividends for numbers of persons; that he had ferreted out moneys which were lying in different places, and after more or less time and trouble had discovered their rightful owners; and that when once he entered upon any such particular pursuit, he spared neither trouble nor expense to arrive at the end.

"Would you believe it, Mr. Evelyn," he said: "I keep a gentleman constantly engaged at the British Museum in making researches for the furtherance of these matters."

"I have no doubt of it," replied Morton. "But would you permit me to ask—"

"How I first came to know anything about this fortune to which I trust your claim will be proven?" exclaimed Waldron. "Why, it was singular enough. When I myself was one day engaged at the Museum, looking over manuscripts and old books, in search of some lost links in a particular pedigree—that must have been about twelve years ago—I stumbled over something that afforded me a hint by which I failed not to profit. I made farther researches: the matter grew clearer and clearer: then I pursued my investigations elsewhere—I consulted the books of the Bank of England and the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund—in a word, Mr. Evelyn, I have been engaged for twelve years in following up this very affair which has led to our acquaintance."

"And what do you suppose, Mr. Waldron," inquired Morton, "may be the probable amount—"

"Ah! whatever I may receive as my own share," interrupted the lawyer, filling his glass and passing the decanter, "I can assure you I shall have fully earned it: for heaven knows the trouble I have taken, the time I have lost, the money I have expended! There is not in the British islands a single family bearing the name of Evelyn with which I have not communicated. You would be astonished at the number of Evelyns there are! Then I have spent days and days in searching amongst pedigrees at the Herald's College—in perusing wills at Doctors' Commons—in turning over mouldy documents in the State Paper Office,—yes, and even in penetrating into vaults and taking notes from coffin plates," added the lawyer with a significant smile.

"Your labour has been indeed great," observed Morton. "But might I ask—"

"And then too," pursued Waldron, "the parish registers that I have searched—the money I have spent in advertising—the correspondence I have been compelled to sustain—the myriads of interviews I have granted to visitors respecting this business—it is altogether incredible!"

"I can believe it," observed Morton. "And now at length you do really believe—"

"We shall see, my dear sir—we shall see!" exclaimed the lawyer, as if anticipating the question that was about to be put. "The next few months will tell us more. I think—indeed I hope—But however you must wait patiently for a time, as I have done for years! And now, Miss Waldron will be expecting us in the drawing-room."

To the drawing-room they accordingly ascended; and during another hour that Morton Evelyn remained beneath that roof, not another syllable was said upon the one grand topic. When he rose to take his leave, Mr. Waldron assured him that he

would be always welcome at the house; and Honoria—for that was Miss Waldron's Christian name—shook hands with him at parting.

As he rode home to his lodgings, Morton said to himself, "Yes—it is evident that Waldron knows he is at last upon the right track, and that I am the heir to this wealth! But he is guarded and reserved—and naturally so. He is a lawyer—and he exercises professional caution. Beside, he is really quite right in keeping his secret tolerably close; for if, after all, I should turn out *not* to be the heir, it would not do for him to have given me a sufficient insight into a matter which he chooses to be followed up by himself alone. His daughter is certainly a splendid young woman—and altogether they are very nice people."

Morton Evelyn was now in possession of funds which would have enabled him to follow the world of fashion out of town if he thought fit: but he had no longer any inclination to quit the metropolis for the present. It was important that he should remain on the spot to pay unremitting attention to the grand business that so vitally concerned his interests. On the following day he settled some pressing liabilities which he had incurred; and amongst other debts thus liquidated, was his hotel-bill. He called in Russell Square; and finding Miss Waldron alone, passed an agreeable hour with her; so that on taking his leave, he was still more impressed with the exceeding beauty of her person.

Several weeks now passed, during which Morton Evelyn led a more regular life than for two or three years he had done. He did not revisit the gambling-table: he had not the slightest inclination so to do: the excitement of the business in which he now found himself engaged, was quite sufficient for him. He moreover became intimate with the Waldrons, and was a constant visitor at their house, where he was always most cordially welcome. Honoria Waldron's elder sister was married, and was a year older than herself: this lady and her husband were likewise now within the range of Morton's acquaintance. Mr. and Mrs. Lister—for that was their name—were hospitable people: they lived in good style and gave pleasant parties. The Waldrons likewise received a great deal of company; and Morton's name was never omitted from the list of invitations at either house. He soon perceived that there were several young gentlemen who were anxious to pay their court to Honoria Waldron: but she evidently favoured none of them; whereas in a short time she appeared to consider that Morton Evelyn was the guest who stood upon the most friendly and intimate footing at her father's house. Thus Morton—half by his own accord, and half by the irresistible influence of circumstances—was gradually led on to pay marked attention to Honoria Waldron.

As for the business, Mr. Waldron seemed to be satisfied with the manner in which it was progressing; though in respect to its details he left Morton almost as completely in the dark as at first. But in consequence of those reflections which Evelyn had made on his way home from his first dinner in Russell Square, he abstained from putting any pointed questions to the attorney; and as the latter from time to time dropped a hint which was more and more encouraging to Mor-

ton's hopes and prospects, the young gentleman used to say to himself, "Well, it is better I should let Waldron go on in his own way, and not pester him with queries, nor endeavour to drag him into premature revelations."

Morton's time was fully occupied. There were always new advertisements for him to draw up and insert in the public journals: a considerable portion of the correspondence which these advertisements elicited from all quarters of the country was addressed to Morton's lodgings; and though he carefully perused it all, yet having but little aptitude for business—notwithstanding that he was in other respects intelligent enough—he became completely bewildered amidst baptismal certificates, copies of pedigree, long descriptions of lineage, and all those matters that necessarily pertained to the business. Daily, at about eleven o'clock, he made his appearance with all the letters at Mr. Waldron's office; and there perhaps he was engaged for an hour in making memoranda which he could not understand, and taking notes which enveloped him as it were in a fog. But Mr. Waldron seemed to look upon everything that was being done with a far more lucid gaze, and to be perfectly satisfied with every successive step that was taken; so that this was sufficient for Morton Evelyn. From the lawyer's office he was wont to wend his way to Russell Square, where his morning calls grew longer and longer; while his evenings were now invariably spent there, unless he happened to be engaged at the Listers'—but even in this case he was certain to meet Honoria. We should add that another cheque for five hundred pounds was one day presented to him in a friendly off-hand manner by Mr. Waldron; and another bill, with its accompanying warrant-of-attorney, was duly signed under the special auspices of Mr. Timperley.

And now the reader may ask whether Morton Evelyn really loved Honoria Waldron? But to answer the question properly, we ought to enter into a disquisition upon love itself, and draw the distinction between that passion which arises from admiration of a handsome face and a fine figure, and that sentiment which, being of a more æsthetic quality, is purely sentimental and is engendered by all the softest and most delicate traits of the feminine character. However, without elaborating the subjects, we may observe that it was the former feeling which Morton Evelyn experienced towards Honoria Waldron. He was enamoured of her beauty: she was a woman of whom as a wife he could be proud; and moreover there was a tinge of selfishness in his calculations.

"Her father is rich," he said to himself; "and he will be richer still when this business of mine is brought to a conclusion. When he dies, all his fortune will no doubt be left between his two daughters. Thus, in any case, an alliance with his family must prove an excellent match for me: for if I succeed in this business, the money which reverts to the old man as a per centage will come back to me again; and if I fail, I shall have secured a good position, together with a handsome competency. As for any little defects which I may have noticed in Honoria's temper or disposition—they are indeed nothing; for what being is perfect in this world?"

The reader is now prepared to learn that

Morton Evelyn made up his mind to propose to Honoria Waldron. He had already received sufficient encouragement, alike from her father and herself—or we perhaps ought to say that he had seen sufficient indications to convince him that his suit would not be rejected by either. He therefore availed himself of an opportunity to declare his attachment to Honoria Waldron; and he was accepted, conditionally on a reference to her father. Mr. Waldron gave his assent; and thus Morton became the acknowledged suitor of the attorney's daughter. Mrs. Lister—who was almost as handsome as Honoria, and who certainly possessed several traits of a more amiable character—had always received Morton with kindness; and she now welcomed him as her future brother-in-law. Mr. Lister—who was a merchant—a good-natured, hospitable man, some few years older than his wife—had also taken a liking to Morton; and thus there was not the least impediment to what the world would call "the consummation of his happiness."

Mr. Waldron now manifested the most substantial proofs of a generous and friendly liberality. He presented Evelyn with a cheque for a couple of thousand pounds, to hire and furnish a handsome house at the West End of the town; and again were certain little formal documents signed under the auspices of Timperley.

"For," as Mr. Waldron smilingly observed, "when the grand business is brought to a conclusion, there can be a settlement of all those little matters."

Moreover Mr. Waldron intimated that he might have given this couple of thousand pounds as a dowry to his daughter: but he knew that a husband naturally liked to be independent of his wife; and therefore he preferred the course which he was now adopting. Morton thanked the lawyer with an effusion of gratitude, and lost no time in fitting up a commodious house for the reception of his bride.

It was at the commencement of autumn, in 1829, that we introduced Morton Evelyn to our readers: it was in the first week of February, 1830—precisely six months afterwards—that the nuptials were celebrated. The wedding tour was accomplished; and at length we behold the bridegroom and bride installed in their new mansion. Months passed away; and though the grand business thus dragged itself slowly along, yet Mr. Waldron from time to time spoke more and more confidently, until at last it came to be regarded as a matter of course that Morton was the heir to that vast property, concerning the details of which he was still kept in the dark. Mr. Waldron liberally supplied him with money; and it seemed as if there could have been no possible drawback to Morton's happiness, were it not that those little defects of temper and disposition which he had observed on Honoria's part during the period of his courtship, were now gradually taking more palpable developments. He found that she was more worldly-minded than he had thought her—that she was self-willed even to imperiousness—that she was growing tyrannical towards her domestics; and he even feared that she was more than selfish—she was heartless. But he humoured her for a variety of considerations. He loved her after his own fashion; and he was proud of possessing so hand-

some a wife. He moreover felt that he lay under the deepest obligations to her father; and being naturally good-hearted and generous-minded, he always feared lest he himself should be in the wrong in thwarting her wishes or refusing compliance with her will. Nevertheless, as time progressed, his misgivings increased with regard to the temper and disposition of Honoria. But on the other hand, her conduct as a woman was marked by the strictest propriety. She was too proud for levity, and too sensible to encourage adulation. In the same way she was too strong-minded to be either a coquette or a flirt: indeed, though fond of the gaiety and recreation of society, she despised and abhorred its frivolities. Thus Morton Evelyn experienced not the slightest cause for jealousy; and he possessed a wife whose superb beauty was a source of gratification to his pride, while it engendered not the slightest uneasiness in his mind.

At the close of the year 1830, Honoria presented her husband with a daughter, upon whom the name of Agnes was bestowed: for this was the Christian name of Morton's deceased mother—and Mr. Waldron, with a mysterious significance, hinted that it was well to retain in the family any honoured names which had belonged to Morton's progenitors. A few weeks previous to the birth of Agnes, Mrs. Lister had likewise been confined of a daughter; and upon this babe the maternal name of Floribel was bestowed. As the reader may imagine, there were great rejoicings at those two happy events; and Morton Evelyn experienced all a father's pride and bliss when contemplating the tiny face of his little Agnes. Indeed, he had now every reason for being happy, inasmuch as it was only a few days after the birth of Agnes that Mr. Waldron gave him the joyous intelligence that the grand business itself was verging towards a successful climax.

At length the day—the long-wished for day arrived, when Morton Evelyn was to receive full explanations from Mr. Waldron's lips. Little Agnes was precisely one month old; and Honoria, completely convalescent, seemed more beautiful than ever. She was likewise in a charming humour as her husband imprinted a kiss upon her cheek when rising from the breakfast-table to hasten away to her father's offices: for Honoria was naturally as much rejoiced as he himself at the prospect of the speedy inheritance of vast wealth. We ought perhaps here to observe that though Honoria, previous to her marriage, had been tolerably conversant with her father's affairs, yet she had always assured her husband that in respect to the one grand secret Mr. Waldron had maintained as much mystery towards herself as towards him.

It was with a light footstep, and, if possible, a still lighter heart, that Morton Evelyn entered the outer office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and inquired if Mr. Waldron had yet arrived? Timperley looked up from his desk with a significant smile upon his usually sinister countenance, as he bade Evelyn "good morning," and replied in the affirmative to his question: for the head clerk evidently knew that this was the grand day for revelations. The next moment Morton was in the private room, where his hand was at once grasped with a fervid cordiality by the lawyer

"Now, my dear Morton, sit down," said Mr. Waldron, "and listen to the explanations which I have to give. I will at once tell you that your prospects are even more brilliant than I have hitherto suffered you to foresee or anticipate; and if I have maintained so utter a secrecy on the point, alike to Honoria and yourself, it has been from the kindest motives; for I was fearful that if I raised your hopes too high, the disappointment in case of failure would have been sufficient to crush your spirit altogether."

"I have always given you credit, my dear sir, for the best of motives," replied Morton, quivering with a joyous suspense.

"And you have exhibited a most praiseworthy patience," resumed Waldron: "you have laboured likewise with assiduity; and at those times when you least understood what you were doing, you were in reality affording most material aid to the progress of the business. It has been, as you have perceived, an affair of tediousness and of difficulty—a tangled skein that to many minds would have appeared impossible of unravelment. But at length all is accomplished; and our labours are about to be rewarded."

Mr. Waldron paused for a few moments—drew his chair closer to the desk—and with a look where joy blended with a business like air, he continued in the following terms:—

"You are now to learn, Morton, that you are the heir to enormous wealth. There are both estates and ready money; and the entire property can be obtained with ease—without the slightest litigation—merely with the fulfilment of certain necessary forms—affidavits to be made, documents to be signed, and so forth. The ready money—originally a sum of no very considerable amount—has accumulated by means of compound interest to its present magnitude. The sum consists of no less than two hundred thousand pounds."

"Good heavens! is this possible?" exclaimed Morton, almost wild with joy.

"It is possible—it is true!" responded the lawyer. "But do not excite yourself: be rational in your rejoicings; for you have not yet heard half the happy intelligence which I have to communicate. The original sum lay for many long years in the Bank of England, where, by means of compound interest accumulating over and over again, it reached its present vastness—when it was paid over into the Sinking Fund, from the Commissioners of which Fund it can be recovered without delay or difficulty. The estates are situated in Wiltshire: they long ago reverted to the Crown through the non-appearance of an heir: but from the Government they can be recovered with the same ease as the money from the Sinking Fund. Those estates cannot produce less than six thousand a-year."

"It is marvellous!" said Morton, scarcely able to credit the evidence of his own ears.

"But even this is not all," resumed Mr. Waldron. "With those estates is associated a title. They were purchased by a grant from Parliament, as a reward to a distinguished personage for great and important services which he rendered in the capacity of Governor-General of India. That personage, Morton, was your progenitor. A century and a half has elapsed since Sir William Evelyn, having terminated his useful and honour-

able career, as Viceroy of the Anglo-Indian possessions, returned to this country to receive the thanks of Parliament, the gift of the estates to which I have alluded, and the peerage of Ormsby. You, Morton Evelyn, are his lineal descendant—you are the heir to his wealth—you are Lord Ormsby!"

Mr. Waldron had been speaking slowly and in measured terms; but these concluding announcements he made more deliberately and cautiously still; for he perceived that a faintness, produced by an overpowering joy, was creeping upon Evelyn. Indeed it would be impossible to describe the effect of those revelations; and unable to give utterance to a word, Morton took and pressed the lawyer's hand, retaining it for some moments, while the tears trickled down his cheeks.

"And now, my dear Morton," said Mr. Waldron, after a long pause, during which the young man regained his self-possession, "I have told you everything. But you cannot immediately assume the title which belongs to you: you must wait until the assembling of Parliament—which will be in a month or six weeks—when certain forms or ceremonies will have to take place before a Committee of Privileges of the House of Lords; and your right to the title will be immediately recognised. Indeed, as we have now all the documents which are requisite for obtaining possession of the fortune and estates, those same papers necessarily establish your claim to the peerage. To-morrow we will give the proper notices in respect to the money and the land;—and now you may hasten home to communicate all these joyous tidings to Honoria."

Morton Evelyn again pressed his father-in-law's hand with fervour; and he hastened from the private room—for he was burning with a joyous anxiety to carry the intelligence to his wife. In the front office Mr. Timperley—who had evidently been all along in his employer's secret—descended from his high stool; and making a low bow to Morton, said, "Permit me to congratulate you, sir—or I ought more properly to address you as *my lord*."

"No—not yet, Timperley—not quite yet!" ejaculated Evelyn: but how pleasing did that title of "*my lord*" sound to his ears!

The old copying clerk—whose brain was fuddled with the lingering effects of the previous night's potations—gazed with stupid wonderment: while the out-door clerk, imitating Mr. Timperley's example, leapt down from his stool and bowed to Morton; though he was as much at a loss as the old copying clerk to understand the meaning of the scene that was passing: for of the three officials Timperley alone had been in the secret. Morton threw down a five-pound note, desiring that the clerks would regale themselves to celebrate his good fortune; and he sped homeward.

The house was reached: he rushed up to the drawing-room—where he found Mr. and Mrs. Lister seated with Honoria; and in a moment the tidings were communicated. Honoria, as the reader may suppose, was too strong-minded to faint: but she was sufficiently enamoured of wealth and titles to give vent to the most joyous exclamations on receiving the announcements from her husband's lips. Mr. and Mrs. Lister proffered their sincerest congratulations; and Morton felt more proud than ever of his wife, as he thought

to himself that a coronet would sit gracefully indeed upon that superbly handsome head.

CHAPTER IV.

ORMSBY.

THROUGHOUT that day Morton Evelyn was a prey to all the restlessness, the feverish excitement, and the wildering sense of an intoxicating joy at the brilliant prospects which lay before him. He had no power for deliberate reflection: he was like a child suddenly surrounded with quantities of new toys. He embraced his wife a thousand times, and lavished the most fervid caresses upon his babe. Honoria was more sedate and reasonable: but she was in such an excellent humour that she did not utter a syllable of rebuke or remonstrance for what she nevertheless conceived to be the extravagance of Morton's conduct. He could not long remain indoors: he felt as if the whole world were interested in his happiness—and he longed to impart it. He was like a woman anxious to communicate a secret to all her gossiping friends.

Morton sped to the hotel where in his bachelor-days he was wont to dine, but where for upwards of a year past he had been almost a perfect stranger; and he told his tale to the landlord, to the waiters, and to two or three acquaintances whom he met in the coffee-room. He was wild—almost delirious with happiness. He proceeded to the shops where he was accustomed to deal: he made purchases of things that he did not want, that he might find opportunities of publishing his affairs as widely as possible. He ordered home quantities of the costliest jewellery as presents for Honoria; for was she not shortly to be hailed as a Peeress? and must she not deck her superb person with all the most brilliant gems? Morton wandered about the streets, stopping every acquaintance in order to tell his tale, and bestowing the most fervid pressures of the hand upon individuals to whom he was only slightly known, and whom he had previously been accustomed to pass with a simple bow of recognition. He met a gentleman who held a high repute in the fashionable world, and whom he had originally encountered at one of Mrs. Lister's evening parties. This gentleman proposed that Morton should become a member of the very aristocratic and exclusive club to which he himself belonged: the offer was gratefully accepted; and the fashionable gentleman promised to propose Evelyn's name that very day.

A night's rest sobered down somewhat the wildness of Morton's joy—or at least calmed its delirium; and after breakfast he set off for Mr. Waldron's office. The lawyer was already there, and awaiting him. Morton sat down; and Mr. Waldron said, "I have drawn up the requisite documents to be served as notices upon the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund and the Government. They are ready for your signature."

Timperley made his appearance with the papers, which Morton at once signed; and Mr. Waldron said, "Take a cab, Timperley—and leave these notices in the proper quarters."

The clerk bowed and disappeared; and Waldron, pointing to an immense pile of documents

tied round with red tape, said, "All these regard you, my dear Morton. I do not know whether you have the patience or inclination to look them over at present——"

"Perhaps," interrupted Evelyn, "it would answer all purposes if you were to explain to me precisely how it is that I am the lineal descendant of Lord Ormsby."

"His lordship was a widower and childless," replied Waldron, "at the time he was raised to the peerage. He had risen from comparatively nothing; and the family to which he belonged—your family, Morton—was a very poor one. Whether it were through pride or from any other motives, it is impossible at this distance of time to discover; but certain it is, from some traditional facts which have come to my knowledge, that your ancestor Lord Ormsby had long been estranged from all his relatives. Indeed, so complete was this estrangement, that there is every reason to believe those relatives themselves were ignorant that the great man who after twenty years' absence in the East, returned to England laden with honours and to receive fresh ones, was identical with their poor kinsmen of former times. Certain it is, also, that at Lord Ormsby's death there was no claimant for either the title or the property—although his lordship left a nephew behind him. This nephew was in such destitute circumstances that he was the inmate of a work-house. He was a depraved and dissipated man; and his reason was impaired by a long course of intemperance. Therefore, all things considered, it really is not surprising that the peerage and the property should have remained without a claimant. That nephew of whom I have been speaking, was the father of the Andrew Evelyn to whose name your recollections went back, and whose lineage it was so requisite for us to trace. You now perceive, my dear Morton, what intricacies I have had to fathom—what a tangled skein to unravel; and if on the one hand you have to blush that there should have been a worthless pauper in your family, yet on the other hand you have to rejoice in a lineage tracing itself back to a proud peer."

"And neither my father nor my grandfather suspected their noble descent?" said Morton, who had listened with the deepest interest to Mr. Waldron's statement.

"Assuredly not," replied the lawyer; "for if either of them had entertained the slightest scintillation of an idea of such a descent, the task which has been so difficult for us, must have proved a comparatively easy one for them to accomplish. I have succeeded in ascertaining that your progenitor Andrew Evelyn was only a small tradesman at Birmingham, in a very poor way of business, at the time when he removed to Liverpool, at the age of about thirty, and began laying the foundation of that mercantile establishment which your father subsequently raised to so flourishing a condition. In short, all the particulars at which I have been thus rapidly glancing, together with many corroborative evidences, are contained in these papers:"—and Mr. Waldron again pointed to the huge pile which was on the desk before him.

"Shall I be personally examined before the Lords' Committee of Privileges?" inquired Morton.

"Most certainly," answered Mr. Waldron. "Indeed you must make yourself thoroughly acquainted with every particular."

"In that case," said Evelyn, "I had better take the papers with me, and lose no time in addressing myself to the study of them."

"By all means," rejoined the lawyer. "But be sure and take great care of them; for in a few days they will have to be submitted to those authorities at whose hands we are claiming the money and the estates."

Morton promised that he would take the utmost care of the precious documents; and he bore them away with him. On returning home, he found Honoria reading the *Morning Post*; and with a flush of pride upon her handsome countenance, she directed her husband's attention to a particular paragraph. It was to the effect that "the Ormsby Peerage, which had so long remained in abeyance—together with the accompanying wealth—was about to be claimed by Morton Evelyn, Esq., a lineal descendant of the long deceased peer."

It was no wonder that this piece of intelligence should have thus been caught up by some penny-aliasing caterer for the public press, inasmuch as Morton himself had published it so widely on the preceding day. His joy was extreme; and his pride was immensely flattered when he perused that paragraph.

He and Honoria sat down to read the documents: but the task was for Morton a dull one—and his brain was not yet sufficiently composed to enable him to catch the sense of the involved, tortuous, and obscure legal verbiage. He therefore soon abandoned it, declaring that on the morrow he should be in a more congenial mood for such a study.

Three or four days passed; and Morton Evelyn found that all the friends and acquaintances whom he now met, addressed him as "my lord," and treated him with the utmost distinction. He fell in with his fashionable friend, who informed him that he had been elected a member of the Club under the title of Lord Ormsby.

"For we all saw the paragraph in the newspapers," added the gentleman; "and as it will be merely a matter of form to obtain the recognition of the Peers, you are already Lord Ormsby to all intents and purposes. Allow me therefore the pleasure of introducing your lordship to the Club."

Morton was introduced accordingly; and he was greeted as Lord Ormsby by several noblemen and gentlemen whom he met there. A Duke, a Marquis, a couple of Earls, and three or four Barons, had thus sanctioned his immediate assumption of the title: why therefore should he not assume it? Had he not for years past been entitled to that proud rank, if he had but known it? And besides, it was so sweet to be addressed as "my lord;" and he should feel so proud in bearing his Honoria styled "your ladyship." Yes: assuredly, he would at once take up his title—at least with Mr. Waldron's permission.

Away, then, to the lawyer's office to consult him on the subject. Mr. Waldron heard what he had to say—reflected for a few moments—and then gave his assent. The delighted Morton hurried home to tell Honoria that she was thenceforth to be called Lady Ormsby: a hint to the same effect

was given to the domestics; and the swelling sounds of "my lord" and "my lady" began to echo through the house—while the unconscious babe Agnes was spoken of as the Hon. Miss Evelyn.

A few more days passed; and favourable answers were received in respect to the notices which had been served by Timperley. The Commissioner of Woods and Forests were quite prepared to give up the estates in Wiltshire—the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund were equally ready to assign the two hundred thousand pounds—so soon as the satisfactory documentary evidence should be produced. Everything was thus going on well; and a day was appointed for Morton and his solicitor to wait upon the Commissioners of Woods and Forests and the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund.

On this day Morton was to be at Mr. Waldron's office at eleven o'clock punctually,—he in the meanwhile having gained some dim and vague knowledge of the contents of the voluminous documents which he had undertaken to study. It happened that Morton, in his eagerness to be punctual, was a quarter of an hour before his time at the lawyer's chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields. He had caught a glimpse of the old copying-clerk shuffling round the corner of the nearest street and diving into a public-house to obtain his morning's potation; and the out-door clerk was absent at Westminster Hall. There was no one in the front office when Morton entered it; and he was gliding towards the door of Mr. Waldron's private room, when he was suddenly transfixed with astonishment on hearing the usually obsequious, respectful, and low-speaking Timperley ejaculate in a menacing manner, "Well, Mr. Waldron, those are my terms! I insist upon ten thousand—and I will not take a shilling less."

"Hush, Timperley! be reasonable!" said the lawyer, in a half-frightened, half-conciliatory tone.

"I am reasonable," replied Timperley, still in a peremptory and menacing voice. "I am not going to risk putting my neck into a halter for such a beggarly trifle as five thousand. So if you don't accede to my terms, I will blow the whole affair and spoil your game. There has been forgery—there is now to be perjury—"

"Hush, hush! — for God's sake hush!" said Waldron. "Consider all the expenses that I have been at—But come, Timperley, we will split the difference! You shall have seven thousand five hundred."

"Not a shilling under the ten thousand!" was the clerk's stern response. "You had better make up your mind, or I will tell Evelyn when he comes that it is all a rascally fraud and that he is no more a Peer than I am."

At that moment the door—which Timperley had no doubt unguardedly left ajar when entering to speak to his employer—was thrown wide open, and Morton Evelyn staggered into the private room. His countenance was as pale as death: he gasped for utterance; but he could not speak—the power of articulation was suspended. Sinking down upon a chair he gazed with a vacant wildness, first at Waldron, then at Timperley; and his feelings suddenly finding vent, he burst into

The lawyer and his clerk were at first stricken with dismay; and then Waldron, bending a look of fierce hatred upon Timperley, as much as to say that it was all through him this occurrence had taken place, waved his hand for him to be gone. Timperley accordingly issued from the private room, closing the door behind him; while Waldron settled his countenance into a stern resoluteness of expression, as if his mind were already made up how to deal with the present emergency.

"And thus it is all a dream!" said Morton, dashing away his tears: "nay, worse than a dream—a vile hellish fraud! And you, Mr. Waldron—you are a villain!"

"Remember, sir," replied the solicitor sternly, "that I am your father-in-law."

"But not the less a villain!" ejaculated Evelyn, with a look that was half haggard, half infuriate.

"And if I be a villain, sir," retorted Waldron, "I have the means of throwing all the burden of that villany upon your shoulders."

"No, by heaven, I am innocent!—you know that I am innocent!" cried Morton: "and the best proof is that not for worlds will I consent to profit by that villany which is all your own!"

"You will consent—and you will profit by it," answered the lawyer coldly. "Think not that I am in your power: it is you who are in mine."

"No, sir—there is justice upon earth," exclaimed Morton: "and by the living God! I will vindicate myself. Oh, to think that I should have become ensnared in these fearful meshes! But I will cast them off—I will be another Samson rending the bonds which his enemies have put upon him. Just heaven! that you could be so guilty!"

"You had better compose yourself and listen to me," replied Waldron; still with a cold and almost scornful confidence.

"Speak! What have you to say?" gasped Morton Evelyn, sinking down upon the chair from which in his excitement he had sprung up.

"You have now seen enough of me," resumed Waldron, "to judge how fully capable I am of arranging all my plans in a manner consistent with my own views, my own interests, and my own safety. Have the kindness to cast a glance over all our dealings together, and over all the progressive steps that have been taken in this business. How stand we? Simply as attorney and client. I have been acting for you, according to the information and instructions which you have given to me. I am your dupe. You came to me and told me that you had these expectations. Your tale was plausible—and I listened to it. So completely did I believe it, that I advanced you considerable sums of money: I moreover suffered you to marry my daughter. At the very outset—in my head clerk's presence—I said that you had honoured me by placing your affairs in my hands and appointing me your solicitor. Nay, the very agreement which you signed in reference to the per-centage, specifies the same facts, and is in the same sense. It was you that inserted the advertisements in the newspapers—who you received the correspondence which they elicited—you who supplied me with all the notes and memoranda that were requisite for the complete making-out of the case. If there has been a tale invented concerning the relationship of a workhouse pauper to the deceased Lord



Ormsby, it is you who have invented it! If there have been deeds forged to establish those facts, it is you who have forged them! They are all in your own handwriting. In a word, there is not a step that has been taken but what you have furnished the instructions: there is not a particular which has been recorded but what you are the author of it. At least, Mr. Evelyn—or Lord Ormsby, as you are, and as you must be called—such is the complexion which the whole matter wears: such is the colour which I can give to it before the world. And now I ask whether I cannot prove that it is I who have been made the dupe?"

Morton sat aghast as he listened in speechless dismay to these announcements which came one upon another, striking him as it were blow upon blow. He was shocked and appalled at the awful amount of villany whereof his father-in-law had

been guilty: he trembled with affright at the web which had been so artfully woven around him. His mind had a horrible clearness for the contemplation of the truth of what Waldron had said when declaring it was in his power to prove that he was the dupe;—and now, when the lawyer had ceased speaking, Morton gave vent to a low groan.

"Surely," continued Mr. Waldron, flattering himself that his son-in-law was completely crushed, and that he could mould him entirely to his will,—"surely you will not renounce that title which you were in such haste to assume and which it is so sweet for you to bear? Think of your wife and your child—"

"Oh, my child!" exclaimed Morton, in a thrilling voice of agony and with a kindred anguish depicted upon his countenance. "To think that my babe should grow up under the auspices of a father who would know himself to be a villain if

be consented to profit by this infernal cheat ! To think, too, that the time may come at the moment I deem myself most secure, when an accident may betray me—when the hand of justice may tear away the mask from my countenance—and when a felon's doom may overtake me ! No, by heaven ! I will not advance another step in this fraud ! You may do your worst."

"And I will do it !" ejaculated Waldron, his countenance livid with rage. "You are in my power in every respect. Turn whatsoever way you will, and you encounter me as the arbiter of your destinies. You owe me thousands : I have your bills and bonds—I can plunge you into a debtor's prison ! I can tax you with fraud, and send you to a felon's gaol ! Now then, dare you speak of renouncing those golden benefits which it is in your power to grasp ? No, no, Morton ! be not so foolish," continued Mr. Waldron, speaking in a conciliatory tone. "The effects would be frightful ! You would cover yourself with ridicule as well as with infamy ! You would involve me, Honoria, and your child in your own ruin ! You think me rich : I am a beggar ! I have spent thousands for thirteen years past in this very business ! I have neglected my profession—I have sacrificed my resources ! As for future danger, Morton, there is none ! Detection is impossible—no accident can ever betray you ! I defy the whole world to discover the fraud of those documents—unless in your madness or folly you reveal it. Now you see that my position is a desperate one ; and if you plunge me into ruin, I will prove horribly vindictive. Oh ! in my vengeance I will forget daughter and grandchild—I will think only of you as the cause of my destruction. I will overwhelm you ! Look how the case will tell against you. A ruined gamster comes to me with a tale which I believe ; and I am made his dupe ! This is the complexion the business will wear !"

All Mr. Waldron's cold insolent self-possession was gone : he was terribly excited ; and thus with mingled menaces, remonstrances, entreaties, arguments, and assurances, he endeavoured to persuade Morton to continue in the path of villany in which his machinations had pleased him. Evelyn was reflecting in agony of mind upon his wife and child—but chiefly upon his child,—that innocent babe who though but a few weeks old, he already loved so fondly !—and he had to decide whether he should become a villain for her sake, or whether on the other hand he should plunge her into poverty. He could not make up his mind.

"Mr. Waldron," he said in a deep hollow voice, while his countenance indicated how terribly his feelings had been harrowed, "I cannot give a decision at present. I must take some hours to deliberate calmly : for even if I were to say *yes* at this moment, I could not proceed another step in the matter to-day."

"Take time then," answered Waldron, now infinitely relieved : for he felt assured that his last speech had touched Morton deeply, and that he would yield to his views.

Evelyn rose, took up his hat, and walked forth from the private room. As he passed through the front office, he encountered the sinister looks of Timperley : but he quickly averted his own regards, and went out into the fresh air.

Scarcely was he gone, when Timperley passed into the inner room,—this time being careful to close the door behind him.

"See what you have done !" ejaculated Waldron, turning fiercely upon the accomplice of his iniquity.

"Is everything ruined ?" asked Timperley, who in his anxiety to learn how matters stood, was heedless of his employer's reproach.

"No, no—I hope not !" replied Waldron. "I think it will be all right. But, Ah ! perhaps he means to go and consult his wife ? He will tell her everything——"

"And she is not a fool," interjected Timperley : "she will advise him——"

"Yes, yes ! Honoria will be on our side !" ejaculated Waldron. "But I had better go and prepare her : or at least I had better be present while they are conversing together. Send at once, Timperley, and fetch me a cab. Ah ! by the bye, you had better take a cab also, and invent some excuse for the postponement of these appointments. It will look odd else ! If you have anything to communicate, you will find me at the West End."

In a few minutes Waldron was seated in a cab ; and when he reached his destination, he found that Morton Evelyn had not yet returned. Honoria was alone.

We must here inform the reader that from the very first instant of Evelyn's introduction to the house in Russell Square, eighteen months back, Honoria had been aware that it was intended he should claim the peerage and wealth of Ormsby ; though her father had kept her in ignorance of the *one* main fact that he had really no legitimate right nor title thereto. Honoria had kept the secret of as much as she did know until it suited her father's purpose to reveal it to Morton. For it was first of all deemed desirable by both father and daughter, to secure him as a husband for the latter ; and when this aim was accomplished, it still continued necessary to multiply and tighten the meshes around him. For the lawyer—a keen reader of human character—had discovered many evidences of good principle in Morton Evelyn ; and he was afraid that if the young man should suspect the legitimacy of the proceedings he would abandon them altogether, unless he were under the pressure of coercion. When it was known that Honoria was in a way to become a mother, the lawyer resolved to wait until Evelyn should have tasted the joys of paternity ; for Waldron thought he would make any sacrifice of feeling and of principle for his child. Hence the delay which had taken place before bringing the business to a crisis.

Honoria had now to learn that her father had been guilty of a fraud—that her husband had discovered it—and that if he persevered, he would be winning rank and riches at the expense of his conscience. She had likewise another secret to learn,—which was, that her father's pecuniary affairs were hopelessly involved, unless redeemed by the consummation of the cheat. Honoria was at first shocked on hearing these truths : but she speedily recovered her self-possession. Though virtuous as a wife, her general principles were none of the most scrupulous ; and, as both her father and Timperley had foreseen, she strenuously adopted their views. She could not endure the idea of

poverty: she had no strength of mind for such an alternative as this:—she had tasted the sweets of aristocratic rank; and she would sooner put a period to her existence than have to look the world in the face and confess that she was not Lady Ormsby after all, but plain Mrs. Evelyn still.

"Rest assured, father," she said, after a long conversation with Mr. Waldron, "that I will talk Morton over. I can do anything with him!—he will not dare refuse to act according to my wishes. But why does he not come? You have already been here two hours—Ah, that is his knock!"

Morton had been wandering about, deliberating with himself—if indeed thoughts that were full of a wildering anguish can be said to constitute deliberation at all. Still he had ultimately made up his mind what course to adopt; and the reader will speedily learn his decision.

He descended to the drawing-room; and on entering it, he ejaculated, "Ah!" upon beholding his father-in-law with his wife.

"Morton—dear Morton!" exclaimed Honoria, hastening forward; "where have you been?—why have you remained absent so long?"

"Honoria," said Evelyn, with a tone and look which left both her father and herself in utter uncertainty relative to any decision to which he might have come,—*"I suppose that you know everything?"*

"Yes—everything, dear Morton," hastily replied his wife, with the most winning and cajoling air. "But do not look so strange at me! Tell me what you mean to do?"

"What would you have me do?" asked Evelyn, fixing his gaze with anxious searchfulness upon his wife's splendid countenance.

"Oh, dearest Morton!" she answered, with redoubled cajoleries; "for your sake, and for our beloved child's—you see I put myself entirely out of the question—I think that you must make a little sacrifice of feeling—"

"Ah! I comprehend!" interrupted Morton, with so strange a voice and look that Honoria shrank back from him. "You call it a *little* sacrifice of feeling? O Honoria, Honoria!" he added, now with bitterness in his accents and anguish in his countenance, "that you could wish me to become a villain!"

"This is absurd!" said Honoria, turning disdainfully away from him: for since her cajoleries had failed, she now meant to try the effect of an imperious mood.

"Wretched man!" cried Morton, addressing himself to Waldron; "is it thus that you have tutored your own child?—is it thus that with your own iniquity you have infected the mind of your daughter? Is it possible that human villainy could have reached such an extent?"

There was something so dignified in Morton's look and manner at the instant—not the false dignity of aristocratic assumption, but the nobility of conscious innocence reproaching consummate guilt—that Waldron became for a moment cowed and abashed; and he forgot the power which he wielded over Morton Evelyn. At that crisis the door opened; and Timperley, looking in, said, "I beg pardon for intruding—but the appointments hold good for to-morrow."

"Ah! — to-morrow!" ejaculated Evelyn in

strange accents; and he rushed from the room, nearly knocking down the head clerk, who was lingering upon the threshold to draw some inference from the scene before him.

"Stop him! he is mad!" exclaimed Waldron, rushing towards the door.

"Morton, Morton!—dear Morton! come back!" cried Honoria, also speeding forth upon the landing.

But at that instant the front door was closed violently; and the three persons upon the landing—Waldron, Honoria, and Timperley—contemplated one another with dismayed looks.

"What can he mean to do?" at length asked Waldron, with frightened accents.

"Depend upon it he will never come back!" replied Timperley, with one of his most sinister looks.

"Hasten to the office," exclaimed Waldron, "and hide the papers! In his madness he may go and destroy them! I shall be there presently."

Timperley hurried down the staircase; and Waldron, retreating into the drawing-room, flung himself upon the sofa, exclaiming, "Good heaven! what does he mean to do?"

Honoria remained standing at the head of the stairs, with her looks fixed upon vacancy. A strong revulsion of feeling was taking place within her. At length she paced slowly into the drawing-room; and closing the door, she advanced up to Waldron. There she placed herself in front of him, and gazed upon him for a few moments without speaking a word.

"Father," she said, at last breaking that ominous silence, "you have done all this. See how high-minded and how well-principled my husband is! Oh, a change has taken place within me—and I loathe myself for having given way to the temptation of riches and titles, and for having endeavoured to seduce Morton into crime. My noble-hearted Morton, where have you gone? Will you not come back to the wife who loves you now more in your poverty than ever she did when you had all your brilliant prospects before you?"

Honoria's voice had risen into wildly passionate and vehement accents; and she stretched forth her arms as if to woo her husband back to them.

"Honoria, you should not reproach me!" said Waldron, starting up from the sofa. "Mortua will come back!—Oh, he must come back! My God! if he does not, I am ruined!"

"And your ruin, father, is a punishment for your guilt!" exclaimed Honoria. "Give me back my husband—that high-minded, generous-hearted husband of whom I never felt really proud till now! Oh, he has died before your frightful menaces! It is you that have driven him from me! No—he will never come back!—never!"

It was in a voice of rending anguish that she spoke; and it seemed as if there were another voice which echoed in her heart the desolating word, "Never!"

Waldron remained with his daughter until a late hour in the night. A servant was despatched to the office to learn if Morton had been there; but the man returned with a negative answer. Waldron was driven to despair: Honoria wept over her babe, which she had never nursed nor fondled so much as she did now. Sometimes she

overwhelmed her father with reproaches: sometimes she besought him to tell her over and over again what he had said to Evelyn at the office, so that she might judge whether there were a chance of her husband coming back:—then she would remain silent for a while, plunged in the deepest despondency: and then she would seek to cheer her spirits by thinking of the kind looks and sweet words with which she would welcome Morton when he should return. But he returned not! Not a syllable of message nor a line of note came to relieve her from suspense: so that at midnight, when the despairing Waldron took his departure, the distracted Honoria sought her couch, with her babe nestling in her bosom.

Several days elapsed—and no tidings were received of Morton. His mysterious disappearance was mentioned in the newspapers; and in those same journals advertisements were inserted imploring him to return to his distracted wife. But still he came not—nor did these appeals elicit any response. Had he committed suicide? Honoria dared not ask herself the question: while Waldron at length felt convinced that such must be the case.

And one morning there were confusion and dismay, horror and consternation throughout Waldron's house in Russell Square. The lawyer had hanged himself during the night. The intelligence was broken delicately to Mrs. Lister and Honoria. The former, who had remained in utter ignorance of her father's villany, was overwhelmed with grief: but the latter received the announcement with an apathetic coldness. It now became known to the world that Waldron's affairs were in a hopeless condition of insolvency at the time of his death; and his suicide, together with Morton Evelyn's disappearance, gave birth to surmises that there must have been something wrong in respect to the claims upon the Ormsby peerage and property. A Government official called at the office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, to inquire for the papers relative to those claims: but Mr. Timperley, who received the visitor, assured him that there were no such papers now at the office, and that Mr. Waldron must have disposed of them previous to the fatal resolve which he had doubtless taken to put a period to his existence.

Honoria never confessed her knowledge of her father's guilt; nor did she give utterance to a syllable of explanation in respect to her husband's disappearance. Mr. Timperley for his own sake kept the secret likewise. Honoria did not long survive the events which we have been relating: she had received a blow which undermined her health; and in less than a year from the date of those catastrophes, the little Agnes was motherless. Her aunt, Mrs. Lister, took charge of her; and she became a companion for her cousin Floribel, who was only a few weeks older than herself.

But before closing this chapter we have yet another tragic event to record. Mr. Lister, by the neglect of a cold, was overtaken by a severe illness, which prostrated him for weeks; and when he began to recover, he returned too soon to his counting-house in the City. He experienced a relapse, which proved fatal; and Mrs. Lister was left a widow, but in tolerably comfortable circumstances. This calamity happened when Floribel and Agnes were about six years old; and the two

little girls were now the only solace of the amiable and excellent Mrs. Lister, who loved her niece as dearly as she did her own daughter.

CHAPTER V.

THE FORMATION OF ACQUAINTANCES.

OUR narrative is about to take a leap of some seventeen years and a half, which will bring us into the middle of the summer of 1848. During that interval what millions and millions of occurrences had taken place, affecting the interests of the millions and millions of human beings upon the face of the globe! How many births had been rejoiced at!—how many deaths deplored! How many individual fortunes built up!—and how many destroyed! How many hearts cheered!—and how many broken! How many children grown up to fulfil all the hopes of their fond parents!—and how many to go astray and turn all those bright anticipations into the bitterness of disappointment! Oh, what a bustling active world is this!—how limitless are its vicissitudes! how countless are the incidents which are crowded into the narrowest space of time!

Seventeen years and a half, we said, had passed away since the memorable occurrences which have formed the principal theme of the previous chapter. One afternoon—on a beautiful day in the first week of July, 1848—precisely as the Horse Guards' clock was striking the hour of four, a young gentleman issued forth with a number of brother-clerks from one of the Government Offices in Whitehall. Having nodded to each other that curt familiar "farewell" which expresses as it were the idea of but a brief separation, and that they would meet again in the same office on the morrow,—they parted to proceed on their respective ways. The young gentleman to whom we have specially alluded, was a remarkably handsome and prepossessing person. Though quite a stripling—for his age was midway between eighteen and nineteen—yet he had a certain manliness about him, which displayed the dignified consciousness of having entered fully upon life. He had recently received the appointment of a clerkship in the Home Office; and might therefore well consider himself to be fairly launched in the world. He was moderately tall of stature—of slender figure—and of perfect masculine symmetry. His limbs were well-knit, denoting alike activity and strength; while his carriage was marked by a certain natural ease and elegance which were in most refreshing contrast with the affected airs and mawkish dandyism of many of those brother-clerks from whom he had just parted.

We must say a few more words relative to this young gentleman before we follow in his footsteps as he pursues his way from the Home Office. He had dark hair, which clustered in natural curls about a well-shaped head; and his countenance had that openness and candour of expression which might even be considered more prepossessing than the strict regularity of his somewhat delicately chiselled features—or which at all events gave additional interest to that perfect type of masculine

beauty. There was something frank as well as spirited in the look of his large clear dark eyes,—and something that indicated goodness of disposition as well as firmness of character in the expression of the well-shaped mouth. He was dressed well—that is to say, genteelly, without the slightest approach to foppishness or coxcombical pretensions. His plain black neckerchief was tied neatly, but without any evidence of study or straining to produce an effect with an egregious bow; so that the made-up dandy would have pronounced it to be absolutely negligent. Altogether he might be regarded as the representative or type of the fine English youth unspoilt by the affectations, the frivolities, and the artificialities which of late years had obtained so strong an influence and tended to render young Englishmen so nauseatingly ridiculous.

The youthful clerk whom we are thus noticing, pursued his way through the various thoroughfares leading towards the Regent's Park. Occasionally he looked at his watch, evidently to time himself, so that without rendering the process of walking a laborious toil, he might still proceed with a sufficient quickness to enable him to reach his destination with a punctuality that should prevent him from keeping the dinner waiting.

Scarcely had he entered the Regent's Park, when he suddenly started even in the midst of his walk; and a glow of pleasure heightened the natural animation of his fine countenance. A little way in front of him—proceeding in the same direction, but at a less rapid pace than himself—were two young ladies, whom he had at once recognised. Their backs were towards him; and it was not so much by their dress that he thus knew who they were, as by the beauty of their figures. They were both of the same height, and above the medium stature, if not actually tall. Dark ringlets escaped from beneath the bonnet of one; and she was somewhat of a fuller shape than her companion—but still of a form that was perfectly modelled. Light tresses, of a golden auburn hue, fell from beneath the bonnet of the other; and her figure was of a more sylphid slenderness than that of the first-mentioned young lady. The Government clerk knew them each by those tresses—knew them each by those shapes; and thus their toilets had really nothing to do with this recognition. Yet we must say one word in respect to those costumes. That of the dark-haired, Hebe-shaped young lady was characterized by its richness as much as by its elegance: while the toilet of the fair-haired and sylphid damsel was perhaps more pleasing on account of its simplicity and utter absence of pretension.

The young clerk now relaxed his pace, in order to remain for a little while behind those ladies, that he might indulge in the choice of whatsoever reflections their presence—or we ought rather to say the presence of *one* of them had excited in his mind. The reader may have already surmised that he was not acquainted with them otherwise than by sight; for if he had been on speaking terms, he would have felt only too glad to accost them, that he might enjoy the happiness of their society. Presently, however, on reaching the corner of one of the roads which intersect the Regent's Park—the young ladies paused, as if deliberating in which direction they should proceed—

whether they should repair homeward, or extend their ramble. While thus conversing the dark-haired one happened to look round; and as the young Government clerk now saw that his presence was perceived, he dared not, for courtesy's sake, continue to linger behind those charming creatures: but he was compelled to pass them by. He did so, and continued his way: but it was not without flinging a furtive glance towards *one*;—and that one was not the dark-haired, Hebe-shaped beauty, but her companion with the tresses of auburn gold and with the sylphid form.

"That, dear Agnes," said the dark-haired girl, "is the young gentleman who has lately come into our neighbourhood, and who lives with his mother, you know, at Belmont Cottage. He goes past the Villa regularly every morning at nine o'clock; and returns as regularly at five. I wonder what he can be? At all events he is exceedingly good-looking."

"Hush, my dear Floribel!" said Agnes: "it is not becoming to notice the looks of young gentlemen who are strangers to us."

"Heavens, Agnes!"—and a half-stifled scream burst from the lips of the dark-haired Floribel, as seizing her companion's arm, she drew her forcibly back at the very moment they had commenced crossing the extremity of the diverging road.

The ejaculation of alarm was caused by the sudden approach of a horseman whose steed was evidently unmanageable; and in another instant the young ladies would have been run over. It was a gentleman of very handsome and distinguished appearance who was thus the unwilling cause of their alarm and danger; and though he was perfectly skilled as an equestrian, yet so high was the spirit of his horse, mingled perhaps with viciousness, that he had evidently lost all control over it. Now it began to rear and plunge: then it launched forth its hind legs as if to kick its rider from its back; and then it rushed upon the path to which the affrighted damsels had retreated. There was now again a moment of serious imminent danger for those young ladies,—when all of a sudden another person appeared upon the scene of excitement. This was the Government clerk; and boldly rushing in front of the horse, he caught the bridle, close up to the bit, on either side with his two hands,—though actually perilling his life in consequence of its terrific plungings. He made the horse back itself into the road: its rider leapt off; and his groom coming up at the moment, the animal was consigned to the man's charge.

"Lead him home, William," said the gentleman. "God knows I am no timid rider—but it is downright folly to risk one's neck in this fashion."

The groom—who was dressed in an elegant livery, and who himself bestrode a splendid animal—touched his hat, and led away the vicious steed, which continued to exhibit certain unmistakable signs of an evil temper as it was being conducted along.

There was a mingled levity and haughtiness in the tone as well as the manner in which the dismounted rider addressed his domestic: but, as we have already said, he was handsome, and had a distinguished appearance. He was tall—taller even than the young Government clerk: his age might be about two and twenty; he had an aristocratic

eratic profile, slightly aquiline,—the short, haughtily curving upper lip wearing a moustache of a brown hue, and which was at least a couple of shades darker than his hair.

But while we are thus pausing to describe him, both he and the Government clerk had addressed themselves to the two young ladies,—the former expressing his regret that his steed should have been the cause of so much alarm and peril—and the latter giving utterance to such re-assuring words as courtesy and circumstances suggested. Agnes, the fair-haired damsel, recovered her self-possession much more speedily than her companion; and with the most bewitching modesty, blended with a bashful confusion, she acknowledged the apologies of the moustached gentleman, and expressed her gratitude to the Government clerk. But Floribel, the dark-haired maiden, clung to the railings for support, and still gave vent to ejaculations of terror, even when all cause for alarm was past. If either of the two gentlemen were the least inclined to be malicious or hypercritical, he might have fancied that there was some little degree of affectation in these continued evidences of alarm on the part of the dark-haired maiden. Indeed, it seemed as if she wanted to be coaxed into being encouraged and reassured, rather than accomplishing that end by an effort of her own will. The gentleman with the moustache was therefore most earnest in persevering in his reiterated apologies; and Floribel at length suffered herself to be pacified.

"I can assure you, ladies," said the gentleman with the moustache, "I am perfectly wretched at the idea of having, though so innocently, exposed you to such an alarm. Permit me to announce myself as the Hon. Mr. Hector Hardress; and may I beg permission to pay my respects to-morrow at your own abode, in order to satisfy my mind that you will by that time have recovered from the effects of this incident?"

"We thank you, sir," replied Agnes, with a certain modest self-possession, as well as with an air which was meant to decline the proffered visit: "but we are now completely recovered."

"You, Miss," said the Hon. Hector Hardress, with a smile of the blandest affability, "have more nerve than your companion.—I am sure you will excuse me for saying so," he added, turning towards Floribel; "and when I consider that I was the cause of your exceeding alarm, I hope you will not refuse me the opportunity of assuring myself that it has produced no serious effects?"

"It really is not necessary," answered Floribel, with a half-smiling bashfulness: "but as you seem to persist—and it will be rude on our part to decline—I must mention that we live at Sidney Villa—at no great distance hence—in the neighbourhood of St. John's Wood."

A look of displeasure for a moment flitted across the beautiful countenance of Agnes, as her companion accepted the proposal of Mr. Hardress to call; but she immediately regained her wonted look of modest sweetness, as if she felt that it was after all a mere act of ordinary courtesy on Floribel's part.

We should observe that the young clerk had started slightly—but so slightly that the movement was almost imperceptible—when the Hon. Hector Hardress had announced his name; and

for a moment he gazed upon him with mingled interest and attention. Then, while that little colloquy between Hardress and Floribel was proceeding, the young clerk rapidly deliberated in his mind whether he should offer to escort the ladies to their residence, which was close by his own home. But he thought he saw something in the modest retiring manner of Agnes which was averse to any precipitate idea of improving the acquaintance which had merely arisen from an accident; and he did not even ask if he also might be permitted to call upon the morrow—though he inwardly resolved that this step he would at least take.

The Hon. Hector Hardress now raised his hat to the ladies—bowed slightly to the young clerk—and strolled away with the fashionable lounging air of a gentleman who had no earthly thing to do except dispose of his time for his own special amusement—a process which on occasions might be languid enough.

"I have the honour of being a neighbour of your's, Miss Evelyn," said the young clerk, thus addressing himself to Agnes when Hardress had lounged away. "Perhaps you will permit me to name myself as Mr. De Vere."

Agnes inclined her head with a sufficiently courteous acknowledgment of this announcement; and Mr. Dr Vere, now raising his hat in his turn, walked rapidly on.

"He knows who we are, you see," said Floribel to Agnes as soon as the Government clerk was beyond earshot. "But he said nothing of calling—"

"And I am sorry, Floribel," answered Agnes gravely, "that you gave permission to Mr. Hardress. And yet, my sweet cousin," she immediately added, "I really cannot blame you; for inasmuch as he persevered with his request, you could not well refuse. It was courtesy for courtesy."

"What a distinguished-looking young man!" ejaculated Floribel. "An Honourable too! He must therefore be the son of a Lord. I wonder who his father is? I daresay we have some book at home that will tell us."

"I really have no curiosity on the point," replied Agnes. "He will doubtless call to-morrow; and pray, my dear cousin," continued the young lady, with looks and accents of the most artless beseeching, "do not give utterance to a syllable that shall encourage him to repeat his visit."

"Rest assured, Agnes," rejoined Floribel, with something like a look of annoyance at an entreaty which she perhaps interpreted as a remonstrance, "I shall do nothing indiscreet or unladylike. But really, my dear cousin, if we are always to lead this hermit-like existence—visiting only a very few families, including those odious Timperleys—"

"Remember, my dear Floribel," interrupted Agnes, again speaking seriously, "that Mr. Timperley was the confidential clerk of our poor grandfather; and I am sure he and his wife have always shown a very kind feeling towards us."

"But his look would be sufficient in a court of justice to condemn him!" exclaimed Floribel Lister.

"Oh, my dear cousin!" cried Miss Evelyn, in a tone of remonstrance, "how can you judge thus by appearances? Mr. Timperley has raised himself from the condition of a poor clerk to that of an affluent practitioner—"

"And yet I am convinced that my mother had no very high opinion of him," responded Miss Lister.

"Why do you entertain this sentiment?" asked Agnes.

"Because my mother did not leave us to the guardianship of Mr. Timperley, nor entrust our money to his keeping," replied Floribel. "Facts speak for themselves."

"Alas!" said Agnes, in a mournful voice; "your mother, Floribel—that kind aunt whom I myself loved as if she had been my mother also—died too suddenly to make any arrangements for our guardianship."

"And that at least is not to be regretted," interjected Floribel: "for deeply as I deplore my dear mother's loss, as you are well aware, I cannot feel sorry because she did not leave us under the care of persons who would perhaps have swayed a tyrannical authority over us. Thank heaven! we are our own mistresses—we have a sufficient income—we have a beautiful little villa and garden—"

"And yet, Floribel," interjected Agnes, "you were only a few minutes back deploring what you term the hermit-like existence which we lead."

"I only meant, my dear cousin," responded Miss Lister, "that we ought to encourage a little more society at our residence: for we really see nobody. A friend now and then to drop in for a morning call—there surely is no harm in that! But come, Agnes, our discourse has grown almost into a dispute; and I think it is the first time since my dear mother's death, two years and a half back, that we have ever talked so warmly."

"Heaven forbid that we should dispute, sweet cousin!" rejoined Agnes emphatically. "Perhaps my words were grave and serious: but they assuredly were not warm—at least not in the sense that you imply. However, let the subject drop: for here we are at home."

The two young ladies had continued their walk while thus conversing; and they now reached an iron gate in the wall surrounding the somewhat spacious garden in the midst of which their villa stood. It was situated on the outskirts of the district of St. John's Wood, and had a most picturesque appearance. The front of the building had a verandah running its whole length, shading the windows of the drawing and dining-rooms, as well as the breakfast parlour, which were all on the ground-floor. The garden was beautifully kept; and several handsome statues were scattered about the grounds.

The front door was opened by a parlour-maid of about thirty, and of most respectable appearance; and if an observer had been by, he would have seen that it was with a glance of pride mingled even with affection that she surveyed her two beautiful young mistresses as they returned home after their ramble. Having put off their walking apparel, they repaired to a species of boudoir which they habitually occupied—and which, with its casements reaching down to the ground, looked upon a lawn at the back of the house. There Floribel threw herself with a languid air upon the sofa, where she began caressing a pet spaniel; while Agnes at once took a seat at her work-table and soon busied herself with some embroidery.

But leaving the fair cousins for awhile, let us return to young De Vere, whom we left pursuing his way homeward. Much as he deplored the alarm which the beautiful damsels had experienced—and deeply as he shuddered at the thought of the danger they had escaped—he was nevertheless in one sense pleased that the incident should have occurred. It afforded him that introduction to Miss Lister and Miss Evelyn which he had longed to obtain, but for which he had hitherto found no opportunity. For the four or five months that he and his mother had dwelt in that neighbourhood, Charles De Vere had been interested in those two young ladies who dwelt by themselves in the picturesque villa. He met them frequently in his walks; he saw them regularly at church every Sunday; he often beheld them, through the bars of the iron gate, rambling in their grounds: but until this day he had never been enabled to address them. The interest which he had at first experienced in *both*, had gradually merged as it were into a tender admiration of *one*; and this one, as the reader has seen, was Agnes. Whether he actually loved her, Charles De Vere had not reasoned sufficiently with himself to arrive at any conclusion on the point: but if he had searched deeply into his heart, he would have found that her image had made no ordinary impression there! Thus was he supremely happy that he had at length formed her acquaintance, and that he had a sufficient excuse for calling at Sidney Villa on the following day.

It was with even a lighter step and a more animated countenance than usual, that he burst into the little parlour where his mother was seated at Belmont Cottage; and having imprinted the usual filial kiss upon her cheek on returning from his office, he exclaimed, "Oh, such an adventure! Do not be alarmed, dear mother!—no misfortune has happened! But if I have been a few minutes later than usual—"

"In that case," said Mrs. De Vere, smiling with maternal pride and affection upon her handsome son, "I am sure that my dear boy has a proper and sufficient explanation to give."

"Only conceive!" cried Charles: "a gentleman's horse was unmanageable in the Park—it nearly ran over two young ladies—and I saved them! And who do you think they were? Those beautiful girls in whom you and I have both been so much interested—"

A singular expression for a moment flitted over the countenance of Mrs. De Vere: but it was so transient that her son perceived it not; and she quietly said, "You mean the two young ladies who reside at Sidney Villa?"

"Yes—Miss Evelyn and Miss Lister," responded Charles. "But the gentleman who rode the unmanageable horse, and whom I really think I saved from a severe fall—who do you fancy he was? None other than the Hon. Mr. Hestor Hardress—the son of Lord Mendlesham, you know, who procured me the Government situation."

Mrs. De Vere dropped her kerchief; and as she stooped to pick it up, she again composed her features, over which an expression still more strange than the former had flitted—not quite so transiently—but of a more marked character: and yet again her son perceived it not—for that pretext of

dropping the kerchief had enabled her to veil it.

"Yes, it was none other than Mr. Hardress," proceeded Charles; "for he mentioned his name to the young ladies. He is to call upon them to-morrow. And I also, I suppose," added young De Vere, his voice now suddenly faltering and his manner hesitating,—"I also must pay my respects—after the incidents of to-day."

At this moment a female-servant entered the parlour to announce that dinner was served; and Charles followed his mother to the dining-room.

Belmont Cottage was a pretty little residence—picturesque enough in its appearance—but without the advantage which Sidney Villa possessed in the addition of a good garden. It stood a little way back from the road, and had some shrubs in front of it, with a small enclosed space behind: but as it was a new building, and the De Veres were the first tenants—moreover as they had only been a few months in its occupation—there was not as yet time to give that place in the rear the appearance of a veritable garden. The house itself was neatly and comfortably, though by no means handsomely furnished: it indicated the possession of a competency, but nothing more, on the part of its occupants.

Mrs. De Vere herself was a lady whose age did not in reality exceed thirty-seven, though she looked two or three years older. She possessed the remains of great beauty, both of face and form: but she was of a pale and somewhat sickly appearance; and a close observer would have noticed that the traces of care as well as of indisposition were upon her features. She was quiet and lady-like in her manners: her voice had an habitual melancholy of tone: and her movements were slow and languid. All these circumstances would have been perceived by any one seeing her for the first time: but Charles, constantly residing with her, failed to take special notice of all those little details to which his eye was so accustomed. He knew that his mother did not enjoy particular good health; but he had no idea that she had any cause for mental disquietude.

During the dinner-time, while the parlour-maid was present, the conversation was not renewed upon the topic which the announcement of the report itself had interrupted: but when Mrs. De Vere and her son were again alone together, it was the former herself who renewed it.

"I have been thinking, my dear boy," she said, "upon all you were telling me when first you came home. As you are aware, I have some slight acquaintance——" and here her voice became for an instant tremulous: but concealing her emotion, whatever it were, with a cough, she went on to speak with firmness,—"as you are aware I have some slight knowledge of Lord Mendlesham and his family; and, I happen to know that his son Hector Hardress has very high and proud notions. Therefore, Charles, if you should again happen to meet him, you must not avail yourself of the little incident of to-day as a pretext for claiming acquaintance with him hereafter."

"Certainly not, my dear mother, if it be against your wishes!" exclaimed young De Vere. "And yet methought that my position is that of a gentleman."

"But he is the son of a nobleman," Mrs. De Vere hastened to observe; "and in a word, Charles——"

"Enough, mother!" he cried, with filial readiness to obey her. "I will do as you bid me. Should Mr. Hardress acknowledge me the next time we meet, I will merely return his salutation and pass on. But——"

"I know what you are about to say," interrupted Mrs. De Vere: and then gazing earnestly at her son, as if some little suspicion had arisen in her mind relative to the interest which he took in the two young ladies of Sidney Villa, she asked, "Have you any particular wish to call upon Miss Lister and Miss Evelyn to-morrow?"

Charles blushed—and for a moment looked down: but suddenly raising his eye with the frankness that was natural to his character, he was struck by the manner in which his mother was contemplating him.

"Surely," he exclaimed, "there can be nothing wrong in calling upon those young ladies?"—and it was even with a feeling of intense uneasiness and most anxious suspense that he spoke; for he feared to put an interpretation upon his mother's looks.

"Nothing wrong!—no, heaven forbid!" she cried. "Those young ladies conduct themselves with the utmost propriety; and their character is unimpeachable. God grant that they may remain thus!" she added, with a deeper fervour than she would willingly have displayed had she been at the moment the complete mistress of herself.

"My dear mother, your words alarm me," said the young man. "Why should you doubt that Miss Lister and Miss Evelyn would always continue to deserve the respect of society?"

"You mistake me, my dear boy," responded Mrs. De Vere, with her natural gentleness. "Those young ladies are very young to be left to their own control: they must be nearly of the same age—and that age cannot be eighteen. However well-principled and right-minded they may be, yet this is an age too tender for them to be left, inexperienced and artless as they no doubt are, to the temptations, the snares, and the deceits of the world. This is the reason, Charles, that I feel so much for them."

"Oh, my dear mother!" exclaimed the young man, "why do you not visit them?—why do you not call upon them?"

"If" almost ejaculated Mrs. De Vere: then again recovering her composure by an instantaneous effort, she went on speaking with her usual placidity of tone and manner. "You know, Charles, that I dislike all society—that my health is not sufficiently good to enable me to court it—and moreover, as those young ladies were already living in this neighbourhood when we arrived here, it would not be consistent with etiquette for me to be the first to call upon them. No, Charles—I shall court no society! And remember, my dear boy, this is not the first time I have warned you that so long as you live with your mother, until you settle otherwise in life, your existence will be a gloomy and a monotonous one."

"Never, my dear parent!" he exclaimed: "for heaven's sake do not think so! I would sooner renounce every idea of calling upon all the Miss Evelyns and all the Miss Listers in the world, than that you should entertain such an idea!"



The young man spoke more fervidly in his generous filial enthusiasm than the real state of his heart in respect to Agnes Evelyn warranted him to do: but still it was no wilful nor deliberate deception on his part. It however had the effect of subduing in his mother's mind the suspicion which a few minutes back she had entertained concerning the nature of the interest that he felt in the occupants of Sidney Villa.

"Yes," she said, after a pause, during which she reflected deeply, "you may pay your respects to those young ladies to-morrow, if you can absent yourself for an hour or two from the Office for the purpose. But do not, my dear boy, make any overtures in respect to a visit from myself to those young ladies; and if they themselves should happen to speak in that sense, give them at once to understand — but without an appearance of rudeness—that your mother is too great an invalid to see any society whatsoever."

No. 4.—AGNES.

Charles promised to bear in mind Mrs. De Vere's instructions; and he retired to his couch with his mind full of the image of the beautiful Agnes, and with the joyful hope of beholding her on the morrow.

CHAPTER VI.

FLORIBEL AND AGNES.

THAT morrow came; and now we must introduce the reader, even more particularly than we have hitherto done, to the two charming occupants of Sydney Villa.

It was an hour past noon; and if we peep into that boudoir to which we have already alluded, we shall find Floribel reclining in a sort of languid indolence upon the sofa, while her cousin was

seated at her work-table. The room was elegantly furnished: there were beautiful statuettes of alabaster upon the mantel; and vases of flowers gave a perfume to the air. Though both the maidens were surpassingly beautiful, yet was there a contrast in their styles of loveliness as well as a marked difference in their dispositions and habits. Floribel had hair of raven darkness, while that of Agnes was of the precious hue in which the auburn resembles light burnished gold. Floribel had large dark eyes, the light of which was not flashing nor dazzling; but it was a lustre that seemed to swim as it were in a soft languor, which would even have been sensuous, were it not attuned by the unmarred innocence and unspoiled purity of her mind:—while on the other hand Agnes had large blue eyes, clear and deep in their hue, soft in their expression almost to melancholy, and so full of reflection and feeling that they seemed only made to contemplate the heavens. Floribel's complexion had the slightest and faintest tinge of the brunette, but with a rich sunny tint upon the cheeks, where the warm blood mentled at times, with any passing emotion, into the depth of the carnation. The complexion of Agnes was stainlessly fair, beautifully transparent, and with the polish of the marble on it: yet it was not of a dull dead white, nor that opaque paleness which constitutes insanimation itself: it was the pure warm living flesh most delicately tinted with a pale pink, which deepened upon the cheeks into the softest blush of the rose. Youth and health lent all their charms to both countenances and to both forms: but the expression of Floribel's face was that of a languid joyousness—while that of Agnes was chastened into a serene and tranquil happiness.

Then, in respect to the shape, that of Floribel already betokened the expending luxuriance of a Hebe-like beauty; while that of Agnes had the slenderness of the sylph, softly modelled and moulded into an admirable justness of proportions. There was a glowing richness about the whole person of Floribel which seemed to denote a nature whose feelings would be warm and whose passions would be strong if subjected to the influences calculated for their development:—while the more etherealised soul of Agnes appeared to shine and breathe through her with the chastest reflection. There was a certain idea of luxuriousness irresistibly associated with Floribel: while Agnes was invested, as an angel, with a halo of purity and innocence. You would look for love in its soft voluptuousness in the dark eyes of Floribel:—you would look for it in its most æsthetic purity in the eyes of Agnes. You would fancy that the former was fitted to lounge out her existence upon the luxurious cushions of an oriental harem: while you would think of Agnes as a being of whom you could not only be proud as a wife, but on whom you could rely in the fullest confidence for the fulfilment of all the sacred duties of that position. You could conceive that a husband might take delight in beholding the superb form of Floribel clothed in richest velvet, with gems flashing amidst her raven hair, pendant to her ears, circling her neck and finely modelled arms, and shining upon the luxuriant contours of her half-exposed bust:—but on the other hand you could imagine that a husband would be best pleased to behold

Agnes in the simplest apparel, trusting to her own beauty as her chief adornment, a simple camellia contrasting with the golden glory of her hair, and the eye of the observer being left to imagine instead of to feast itself upon the charms which the high corsege of the raiment should conceal. In a word, if a sculptor or a painter required a model for the personification of PLEASURE, Floribel might best be chosen: while if on the other hand a model was required for the delineation of BEAUTY in all its virgin purity and its immaculate innocence, Agnes would be the object of the statuary's or the limner's choice.

Yet it must not be supposed from the above description which we have given of Floribel, that she was devoid of good principles, or that there was grossness in her thoughts. Constitutionally she was indolent; and by nature she was true luxurious in her appearance. She would prefer the amusement of a novel to those tasks of embroidery, light work, and really intellectual studies with which her fair cousin was wont to while away her own time. If Floribel could have had her own way, she would have been every evening at parties and amidst gay society: while on the other hand Agnes would have been thankful if no invitations and no visits ever came to disturb the even tenour of her existence. Floribel was fond of decorating the apartments with costly ornaments or frivolous nick-nacks: while Agnes was contented if she beheld the vases filled with beautiful flowers. Floribel lay late in bed of a morning, especially in winter, when she shivered at the slightest cold: but Agnes always rose early—in summer to walk in the garden before breakfast, and in winter to bustle about in order to promote by activity that healthful circulation of the blood which could not be acquired by bending over the fire.

Thus, as the reader has seen, there was a remarkable contrast between the two cousins—not merely in the styles of their personal beauty, but likewise in their tastes, dispositions, habits, and characters. We might elaborate a thousand little details in order to exemplify the latter differences: but we have said enough to enable the reader to form his idea of them; and the progress of our narrative will in its incidents tend to the further development of the contrast.

It was, as we have said, about one o'clock in the afternoon, when Floribel and Agnes were in their elegantly furnished little boudoir,—the former reclining indolently upon the sofa, the latter engaged with her embroidery. The time-piece upon the mantel proclaimed the hour: and Floribel started up, crying, "Good heavens! is it so late? I had not an idea that it was more than eleven o'clock!"

"You must have been completely absorbed, my dear cousin," answered the gentle Agnes, with a smile, "in that volume which you have been reading."

The book had however long ago glided from Floribel's hand, and was lying upon the carpet.

"Yes—no," she said, snatching it up: "I have not been reading it for an hour past. I do not much like it. The heroine appears to stand upon the most ridiculous scruples when the alternatives are to obey her cruel parents or else to run away with her lover; and he himself is a hero not over and above to my taste—for if he had only pressed

her a little more, she certainly would have yielded to his solicitation to elope. Then there might have been a fine chapter about Gretta Green—a pursuit—all the excitement of the chase and the flight—and the successful realization of the lovers' hopes at last. Ah! if I had written the book——"

"I am sure, Floribel," said Agnes, half gravely and half in sweet good-humoured railery, "you would not have inculcated so bad a moral as to represent the heroine enjoying happiness as the result of disobedience to her parents."

"I know nothing about the moral," responded Floribel: "but I do know that the book would have been infinitely more amusing if the plot had progressed as I have suggested. But you, my dear cousin, understand nothing about novels—unless they are Walter Scott's or Cooper's. You are better calculated to give an opinion on Milton's Paradise Lost, Thompson's Seasons, or Crabbe's Works,—of none of which would I read a line if you were to give me a thousand pounds."

"We all have our different tastes," observed Agnes, with another sweet smile,—which, playing upon her bright vermilion lips, displayed the teeth that were comparable only to pearls.

"Yes—but I do not altogether envy your tastes at times, Agnes, when I see you buried in your Milton or your Thompson!"—and as Miss Lister also smiled, it was in a scornful and contemptuous manner,—her slightly pouting lips, which looked in their richness like divided cherries, displaying two rows of teeth which were as faultlessly even as those of Agnes, but more like ivory than pearl.

There was a temporary silence; and then Floribel—who was really good-natured—forgetting that little sentiment of petulance which she had for an instant displayed, exclaimed, "But it is one o'clock!—we shall have visitors coming, and I am not dressed to receive them!"

"Indeed," said Agnes, "you are perfectly well dressed for a morning costume—even too much so——"

"Oh, but I shall change my toilet!" cried Floribel. "And you, my dear Agnes—in that simple muslin dress—you really are not fit——"

"I certainly shall not change it," replied Miss Evelyn, firmly yet softly.

"Ah, my dear cousin, you never think of rendering yourself as attractive as possible!"—and thus speaking, Floribel quitted the boudoir.

Agnes Evelyn had not been many minutes alone, when Rachel—that respectable-looking parlour-maid to whom we have already alluded—entered the boudoir, and placed a letter in the hand of her young mistress. It had just arrived by the penny post: the address was written in a fluent feminine hand, and was directed to Miss Evelyn. Rachel retired; and Agnes opened the letter. Her astonishment may be conceived when she found the contents to run as follow:—

"The writer has reason to believe that the Hon. Hector Hardress intends to call at Sidney Villa. This gentleman is too much addicted to gaiety and pleasure—too fond of dissipation and irregular pursuits—to be an eligible acquaintance for either Miss Lister or Miss Evelyn. This warning emanates from no scandalous spirit nor from one who would stoop to slander. It is the truth!—and the

writer has sufficient faith in the propriety of Miss Evelyn's sentiments and feelings, to be convinced that the caution will not pass unheeded.

"AN UNKNOWN FRIEND."

The frank and candid nature of Agnes Evelyn revolted against anonymous communications, which from their very irresponsibility might at a first glance be looked upon with suspicion. But the warning contained in this letter at once struck her as having a significance which was in accordance with the truth, and which ought not therefore to be neglected. She had not failed to remark on the previous day that there was a certain commingling of levity and hauteur about Hector Hardress, when addressing his domestic—and a certain fulsome cajolery when addressing Floribel. Generous therefore though she usually were in forming her judgments of people, yet she could not now repel the conviction that the anonymous warning was more or less consistent with the truth. She regretted that circumstances should have occurred to render herself and her cousin acquainted with Mr. Hardress: but she resolved that if he called he should receive no encouragement on her part to renew his visit. Her first impulse was to show the letter to Floribel, from whom she had no secrets—for the two young ladies had been brought up together, as if they were sisters instead of cousins. But on second thoughts she reflected that Floribel would be sure to express her indignant disbelief of all anonymous slanders; and that looking upon Hector Hardress as the innocent object of one of these cowardly calumnies, she would for that very reason prove all the more courteous and friendly towards him. Thus Agnes came to the conclusion that it would be better to retain the anonymous letter a secret;—though it pained her to do so; for utterly guileless and completely frank-hearted, the young maiden liked not the thought of adopting any mystery towards her whom she loved as a sister.

Scarcely had she destroyed the letter, when a loud double knock resounded through the house; and Agnes—without the least excitement, but calm and self-possessed—folded up her embroidery, which she placed in her work-box ere she proceeded to the drawing-room. There she found the Hon. Hector Hardress and Floribel; for Miss Lister had hastened from her chamber to the reception-room the moment she heard the double knock. It was evident to Agnes that Floribel had received the young patrician gentleman with a graciousness which he might interpret as a friendly welcome; for he was already conversing with her about the opera and other light matters with the air of a familiar acquaintance. The demeanour of Agnes towards him was strictly lady-like and polite—but nothing more. Indeed her words and her manner at once gave him to understand that she looked upon him in the light of an almost complete stranger whom an accident had introduced. But Hardress was a man of the world: he affected not to perceive that there was aught chilling in his reception by the younger of the two ladies; and having made his bow to Agnes, he glided again with well-bred fashionable ease into the topics which her appearance had for a moment interrupted.

Now there was another knock at the front-door!

and Mr. De Vere was announced. The young Government clerk had obtained leave of absence from his office for the remainder of the day; and he was thus enabled to pay this visit. Floribel—who had really no preference for either, but only wished to encourage the calls of agreeable visitors—welcomed Charles De Vere quite as graciously as she had received Hector Hardress; while Agnes was less reserved and ceremonious towards the newcomer. In the first place, in her manner towards Hardress she was naturally under the influence of the anonymous letter: while on the other hand she could not help reflecting that it was to the dauntless intervention of De Vere that she and her cousin were indebted for their safety on the preceding day.

The Hon. Hector Hardress at once saw that the same incident which had introduced himself to Sidney Villa, had given Charles De Vere an equal claim to be a visitor there. We have already said that he was a thorough man of the world; and he knew that if the ladies should happen to entertain a friendly feeling towards the youth who had rendered them so signal a service, it would not be good policy on his own part to treat that young man with coldness or hauteur. He therefore at once assumed the most friendly demeanour towards Charles De Vere,—whose hand was already grasped in that of Hector Hardress before he had time to fulfil his promise to his mother by merely bestowing a distant salutation. It really was not young De Vere's fault, nor any wilful breach of faith towards his parent, that he thus found himself suddenly shaking hands with the son and heir of Lord Mendlesham.

But during the half-hour which the call lasted, Charles De Vere endeavoured as much as possible to avoid becoming the object of Hector's civilities; though in doing this he bore in mind his mother's qualifying injunction that he was not to exhibit any pointed rudeness. Thus whatsoever little reserve he displayed might well have been taken for a modest diffidence on his part; and to this did Hardress attribute it. It transpired in the course of conversation that Charles De Vere was a clerk in the Home Office: but in order to avoid anything bordering upon communicativeness, he did not mention the fact that it was Hector's own father who had procured him that situation.

The two gentlemen took their leave together; and when he reached the gate opening upon the road, Hardress manifested an inclination to walk with De Vere, or at least to linger for a little conversation: but Charles, raising his hat, somewhat abruptly hastened away. On reaching his home, Charles informed his mother that he had been to call at Sidney Villa and that he had encountered the Hon. Mr. Hardress there. He proceeded to describe, with the natural frankness of his disposition, precisely how he had acted and everything that had taken place—detailing indeed all the salient points of the conversation with an ingenuous minuteness. Thus Mrs. De Vere was rendered as completely acquainted with everything that had occurred at Sidney Villa, as if she herself had been present on the occasion.

As Charles had a half holiday, and there was yet ample leisure till dinner-time, his mother agreed to accompany him for a walk. They ac-

cordingly issued forth together, and rambled into the Regent's Park.

"You did well, my dear boy," said Mrs. De Vere, "to abstain from mentioning to Mr. Hector Hardress that it was his father, Lord Mendlesham, who procured you your present situation. Indeed, I forgot to tell you before—though perhaps there was no need for it—but it is as well now to mention the fact that his lordship does not wish his intervention in the matter to be known, for fear lest it should bring upon him a host of other claimants upon his kindness and interest."

"And how were you fortunate enough, mother," asked Charles, "to succeed thus with his lordship?"

"He was acquainted with my family in earlier years," replied Mrs. De Vere. "But referring, Charles," she added hastily, "to the incidents of the afternoon, I think you told me that one of the young ladies was much more polite than the other to Mr. Hardress?"

"Yes—that was Miss Lister," responded Charles. "Miss Evelyn was more reserved and distant towards him: I even thought that she was cold and formal, as if in the most ladylike manner giving him to understand that his presence was not exactly welcome, at least to herself."

"And do you think it was welcome to Miss Lister?" inquired Mrs. De Vere.

"My opinion is," rejoined Charles, "that she is a good-humoured, gay, and somewhat thoughtless young lady,—who with a certain elegant indolence about her, is fond of chatting and gossiping—I don't mean maliciously or scandalously, you know—heaven forbid!"

"But you think she is fond of society?" observed Mrs. De Vere. "And Miss Evelyn?"

"Oh! she is much more quiet than her cousin," exclaimed Charles. "She does not laugh near so much: there is a more delicate softness in her manner—a more retiring bashfulness—I scarcely know how to explain myself without drawing a comparison which would perhaps be invidious and unfair towards Miss Lister."

"What you mean, Charles," said Mrs. De Vere, "is that Miss Lister is more free, open, and at her ease with strangers or new acquaintances than Miss Evelyn. And Miss Evelyn, you told me, inquired about myself?"

"Yes," replied Charles. "When I spoke of my mother, she said that she had noticed you at church, and occasionally walking out; and it was in a tone of sympathy that she asked if you were in good health? It was then that anticipating any overture on her part towards an acquaintance with you, dear mother, I hastened to inform Miss Evelyn that you never went into society, and that your habits are quiet and domesticated.—But really," added Charles, lowering his tone, and at the same time looking around him, "I cannot fancy why that elderly ill-dressed female keeps hanging about us!"

These words directed the attention of Mrs. De Vere to something which she had not before noticed; and glancing in the direction to which her son's looks had just been turned, she perceived the object of his remarks. This was a female about sixty years of age, whose countenance bore the unmistakable traces of dissipation, and whose expression was sinister. She was of middle stature

—thin almost to emaciation—and stooping in her gait. She was very indifferently dressed,—her appearance bespeaking poverty, and this poverty the result of an irregular course of life.

"She has been hanging about us," said Charles, "for the last ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. When we turn, she turns: she has passed us by two or three times, and taken a good stare at us—and now she is still upon our track! If I thought she was a deserving mendicant, I would give her something: but I do not like her looks."

"No—they are bad enough," said Mrs. De Vere. "Yet if she were a beggar she would scarcely hesitate to accept us—However, offer her a few pence, Charles, and bid her go her way."

Young De Vere was about to comply with his mother's suggestion, when on again looking round he could no longer see the old woman: she had probably disappeared amidst the neighbouring trees. The incident was therefore quickly forgotten: and the discourse was continued between the mother and son as they now retraced their way homewards.

"All things considered, and apart from my having obtained the situation," said Charles, "are you happy, my dear mother, in having exchanged our nest little residence in the country for Belmont Cottage in the neighbourhood of the busy metropolis?"

"I am happy, Charles," she replied, "when doing anything which contributes to your comfort or welfare. I certainly liked the quiet and seclusion of our rural home in Leicestershire; and to you likewise it must have been endearing, as the place where you spent so many, many years—in the neighbourhood too of the school where you were educated."

"And was it not *there*, dear mother," asked Charles, in a gentle voice, "that my father died?"

Mrs. De Vere did not immediately answer: she turned her head away—and at length she tremulously murmured the monosyllable, "Yes!"

"Forgive me, my dear mother," said Charles, "if I have touched on the subject which always affords you so much pain—that subject on which, you know, I so very seldom touch!—but the question rose to the tip of my tongue; and, Oh! is it not natural that at my age I should like to learn something of my poor deceased father—that father who died, as you have told me, in my infancy?"

"Yes, yes—it is natural, my dear boy!" said Mrs. De Vere. "But do not pursue the subject now! Another time, Charles—on a more fitting occasion—when I can better compose my thoughts—"

"Enough, mother!" he exclaimed: "not another syllable for the present!"

He instantaneously changed the discourse; and in another half-hour Belmont Cottage was reached. Dinner was soon after served up; and when the repast was concluded, Mrs. De Vere took her work—while Charles had recourse to a book.

He frequently interrupted his reading to converse with his mother; and presently, when raising his eyes for this purpose, he happened to glance through the window; for it was still quite light on that long evening of summer.

"Ah!" he ejaculated: "that old woman again!"

Mrs. De Vere likewise looked up; and she perceived the sinister-faced ill-dressed crone whom she and her son had noticed in the Park, now loitering in front of the railings. She rang the bell; and when the female servant answered the summons, Mrs. De Vere said, "Take these pence, Margaret, to that poor woman. She doubtless wishes to ask for charity, but is afraid."

The domestic issued forth accordingly; and both Mrs. De Vere and her son observed through the window that the maid was detained for a few minutes in conversation by the old woman. Then the domestic re-entered the house,—the crone still lingering in front of it.

"I wonder what she can want?" exclaimed Charles. "Perhaps she is not contented with what you have sent her out—or she may have some real tale of distress to tell: in which case—"

"If you please, ma'am," said the maid, now re-appearing in the room, "that poor woman begs that she may have a moment's conversation with you. She says that she knew you in other days—"

"Knew me?" ejaculated Mrs. De Vere, with a sudden start.

"So she says, ma'am," continued the servant-woman: "but she says that it was in other circumstances."

"Ah, poor thing!" interjected Charles: "she may have known better times!"

"And she says," proceeded Margaret, "that if you should not happen, ma'am, to recollect her face, you will probably bear in mind the name of Chicklade."

Mrs. De Vere gave no answer, and made no movement. She sat perfectly still, as if in reflection: but had any very scrutinising regards been fixed upon her countenance at the moment, they would not have failed to observe certain evidences of a terrific inward struggle which she was exerting every effort to veil outwardly. Charles happened to be glancing through the window at the time; and the maid-servant had remained close by the door, so that she was not in a position to discern the face of her mistress.

"Yes," said Mrs. De Vere, at length breaking silence—and there was something hollow in her voice, though scarcely perceptible, so preternaturally strong was the power she was exercising over herself. "I have some faint recollection of a person of that name, whom I knew in different circumstances. But show her, Margaret, into the breakfast-parlour—and I will see what the poor woman wants with me."

The domestic again retired; and in a few moments Mrs. De Vere rose from her seat, looking slowly around the room as if in search of something. Indeed it was for a pretext to procure the temporary absence of her son; and catching a glimpse of a phial upon the mantel, she said, "Ah! my dear Charles, I had well-nigh forgotten that this medicine of mine is finished. The prescription ought to be in the writing-case—"

"I will run to the chemist's and have the bottle refilled," exclaimed Charles, not pausing an instant to reflect why it could be that his mother assigned to him a task which the servant was in the habit of performing.

The next moment he was issuing from the cottage; and Mrs. De Vere proceeded to the breakfast-parlour.

On entering that room, she closed the door behind her; and as she turned to do this, a deadly pallor swept over her countenance: but when she again looked towards the old woman, that ghastliness of aspect was gone—and it was only her wonted paleness that rested upon her cheeks. Her look too was now perfectly collected.

"You wish to see me, my good woman?" said Mrs. De Vere, in a compassionating tone: "and if it be to tell a tale of distress and suffering, rest assured that I shall not refuse you relief:"—at the same time she drew forth her purse.

"Don't you remember me?" asked the hag, evidently somewhat taken aback by this mode of address, as well as by that unblenching calmness of demeanour which Mrs. De Vere now wore.

"How can I remember you, my poor woman," asked the lady, "when to the best of my knowledge I never saw you before?"

"And yet your servant," rejoined the hag, "told me that you seemed to bear in mind the name of Chicklade."

"I did not say so," responded Mrs. De Vere: and it was still with an unflinching calmness that she gave utterance to this untruth.

"Strange!" muttered the woman; "and yet I could have sworn to it, although so many years have elapsed!"—then drawing closer to Mrs. De Vere, she fixed her small reptile-like eyes upon the lady's countenance, as if scanning every lineament with the minutest scrutiny.

"Tell me what you require," said Mrs. De Vere: "and if it be in my power I will bestow such charity as I may deem you worthy of."

But while she was thus speaking, the countenance of Mrs. Chicklade expanded or else contracted—we scarcely know which term to use—into an expression of sardonic significance; and with a leer of insolent meaning, she exclaimed, "It won't do! you can't carry it off with this high air of your's! I'd swear that I am not mistaken! Come, let me whisper a word in your ear."

Before the lady could possibly prevent the movement—and indeed she was perhaps so transfixed and petrified with her feelings as to be utterly incapable of drawing back a single pace—Mrs. Chicklade had advanced close up to her and had breathed something in her ear. The effect was instantaneous. Mrs. De Vere started as if a reptile had just stung her; and a look so haggard and woe-begone—Oh! so woe-begone—seized upon her countenance, that the old hag exclaimed with a leer of malicious triumph, "Ah, I knew I was right!"

Mrs. De Vere sank into a chair, and placed her hand upon her brow as if to subdue the senses of excruciating anguish which had fastened itself on her brain. There was a silence of upwards of a minute,—during which Mrs. Chicklade watched the effect which her whispered words had thus produced. But suddenly Mrs. De Vere started up from her seat; and clutching the old woman by the arm, she looked with haggard eyes into her countenance, saying in a deep hollow voice, "You did not drop a word to my servant relative to this?"

"Not a word," replied Mrs. Chicklade. "It

would have done me no good; and as I knew very well that when you and I came to understand each other——"

"Enough!" interrupted Mrs. De Vere, releasing the woman's arm from her grasp as abruptly as she had seized upon it: and it was now with a strong recoil that she stepped back. "You shall have gold!—you shall have the wherewith to improve your circumstances!—but come not near me again! Think not that because I yield this time, I shall on any future occasion consent to become the victim of extortion! No—I will perish sooner!"

An undefinable expression of sinister malignity passed over the hideous countenance of Mrs. Chicklade: but so transient was it that Mrs. De Vere, in the desperate state of her mind, hoped that her own eyes had deceived her and that no such ominous look had in reality appeared upon that wrinkled face. Her purse was upon the table: she emptied it of its contents, which amounted to about eighteen or twenty pounds in gold, silver, and bank-notes; and pointing to the money, she said, "Take it!—and I beseech you to trouble me no more!"

It was evidently an immense treasure in the eyes of that harpid, who had for a long time past known penury and distress as her constant companions. The sum even appeared to be greater than she had expected to receive; and it was thus under the influence of her joy that Mrs. Chicklade exclaimed, "Don't be afraid, ma'am! You have done the thing handsome: it will just give me a lift in the world—and I shan't bother you again!"

Mrs. De Vere sank down once more into the chair from which she had started up; and she made an impatient gesture for the old woman to be gone. A dizziness was in her brain—a film was coming over her eyes—her thoughts were growing confused; and it seemed to her imagination as if some horrible spectre which had been terrifying her was now passing away from her presence. It was not until she heard the door close that she was re-awakened to complete consciousness of everything that had happened. Then the unfortunate lady pressed both her hands to her wildly throbbing brows,—murmuring, "My God, my God! wherefore such a dreadful trial as this?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE GARDEN.

THREE months passed away; and during this period Charles De Vere had improved his acquaintance with the beautiful inmates of Sidney Villa. His calls were at first made at properly distant intervals: but by degrees they grew more frequent. Floribel always welcomed any agreeable person who might drop in to help her while away the time which she would otherwise languish through in a sort of dreamy listlessness; and Agnes received the young gentleman with an affable courtesy. Charles became deeply enamoured of the beautiful Miss Evelyn, in whom he beheld something fresh to admire and love every time that he was in her society. He found that

her disposition was amiable and artless—that her mind was well cultivated—and that she unconsciously as it were gave utterance to the noblest thoughts, proving the strict rectitude of her principles.

The Hon. Hector Hardress likewise called frequently at Sidney Villa: for Floribel gave him sufficient encouragement to do so. This encouragement on her part was however within the strictest limits of lady-like courtesy and propriety—just in the same way as she behaved towards Charles De Vere himself, or any other male acquaintance whose conversation she considered agreeable. Agnes had at first done all she could, by means of cold reserve, to discourage these visits on the part of Hector Hardress; and she had likewise remonstrated with Floribel against suffering him to repeat his calls so frequently. But as Miss Liester—though good-natured and good-humoured—was self-willed, and had an argument in support of everything she did, these remonstrances were of no beneficial effect; while on the other hand they threatened to disturb the harmony which had hitherto reigned between the cousins. Agnes therefore was at length compelled to desist from speaking upon the subject; and thus Hector Hardress continued to call at the villa even more frequently than Charles De Vere.

The manner of Mr. Hardress was so perfectly respectful in its air of well-bred friendliness—and his conversation, though light and superficial, was yet so consistent with the most gentlemanly propriety—that Agnes, little experienced as she was in the ways of the world, began to think that he must have been misled by the contents of that anonymous letter. Fearful therefore, in the natural generosity of her disposition, that she might in the first instance have yielded to the influence of calumny and have done him some injustice, she gradually suffered the coldness and reserve of her manner to wear off; and though far from becoming absolutely cordial in the reception which she gave him, she no longer by her demeanour made him comprehend that his visits were distasteful to herself.

If Hector Hardress were all this time becoming enamoured of either of the young ladies, his manner did not show it. It seemed as if he strove to be on equally friendly terms with both—and as if indeed he merely called from friendly motives as well as from courtesy, and from the pleasure which any young man feels at finding himself in the society of beautiful young ladies.

In respect to Charles De Vere—he, with the bashfulness of his age, and with that species of timid fear which characterizes a first love either with a young man or young woman, studiously veiled the sentiments that he experienced towards Agnes. In this there was neither actual deception nor harm. But on the other hand there was a little deception which Charles was practising in another quarter—and which, though natural enough with a youth who loved for the first time, had really some harm in it. In short, he concealed from his mother the frequency of his visits to Sidney Villa. The discipline of a Government Office is so lax that the clerks may obtain frequent holidays, or absent themselves for two or three hours at a time on any trifling pretext; and thus Charles had no difficulty in finding the leisure to

pay his visits to Sidney Villa. Often, therefore, when his mother fancied he was assiduously engaged in his duties at Whitehall, he was in reality within a stone's throw from Belmont Cottage, seated with the cousins in their drawing-room, or rambling with them in their spacious and beautiful garden. At first Charles had reproached himself for the little deception he was thus practising towards his mother: but, alas for frail humanity! it is the case with even the best of natures that when they become accustomed to those small duplicities and subterfuges which are associated with the tender passion, the whisperings of conscience are more or less easily stifled.

We have yet a few additional observations to make before resuming the thread of our narrative. During that interval of three months to which we have alluded, it necessarily happened that Hardress and De Vere frequently met at Sidney Villa. True to the line of policy which he had at first marked out for himself—and which consisted of a determination to render himself agreeable to all the acquaintances of the two cousins whom he might happen to encounter at the villa, in order that he should thereby prove agreeable to the young ladies themselves—Hardress always observed a most friendly demeanour towards Charles De Vere. It was a friendliness which rendered it impossible for the other to continue reserved or distant: it was the sunshine melting the snow in the latter's own despite, and even when it did its best to retain its frigidity and to resist the thawing influence. Young De Vere—naturally frank-hearted, as we have described him—could not oppose a studied ebullience of manner to those seeming overtures of friendship, and which overtures were invested with all the alluring gloss which the well-bred refinement of the patrician Hardress knew so well how to throw over them.

"After all," Charles would say to himself, "the advice given me by my mother was occasioned only by the apprehension lest Lord Mendlesham's son should think that I was not good enough to associate with him and should treat me with coldness. She feared lest my pride should be wounded by any haughty disdain on his part. Her counsel was therefore good and well-meant—but the necessity for following it has not arisen. It is sufficient that I have not been communicative with Mr. Hardress, nor suffered him to learn how I am under so deep an obligation to his father for the official position that I hold."

The reader now comprehends the precise terms on which those characters in whom he is most interested, stood with regard to one another at the expiration of the interval of three months. It was now the close of September: the weather was still sunny and delicious; but the trees had begun to assume their autumnal tints. Many of the flowers which were the special favourites of Agnes, had faded or disappeared altogether: the fairest and most delicate of the floral beauties of her garden were gone; but still there was sufficient of pomp and gaud and loveliness in many of the remaining embellishments of the parterres to please the eye and to perfume the atmosphere.

It was one forenoon that Agnes Evelyn was rambling in the garden, while Floribel was lounging in dreamy luxurious indolence upon the sofa in the boudoir. Agnes had thrown on a large straw

hat; and she was attired in a neat morning-dress, *à la billée*, the very simplicity of which was elegance itself. Nothing could exceed the loveliness of her appearance; and as she wandered amidst the mazes of the avenues, the light drapery defined her sylphid form against the dark back-ground of the dense foliage of the evergreens. Her well-shaped feet, with their arching insteps, trod lightly upon the gravel-walks; and the skirt of her dress now and then revealed the delicately rounded ankles. There was a gentle breeze subduing the sultriness of the noon-day sun; and upon that æther's breath floated the ribbons of the large straw hat—while at the same time it seemed to play kissingly amongst the luxuriant tresses of her bright auburn hair.

It happened that while Agnes was thus walking in the garden, Hector Hardress arrived at the villa,—on this occasion at least an hour earlier than usual. It was not without premeditation that he thus made his appearance at such a time. He wished to be certain that no other visitors would be there at the same moment; and he was looking out for an opportunity of speaking alone to one of the cousins. He had arrived on foot; and on reaching the iron gate of the garden, which happened to be open, he caught a glimpse of the sylphid form of Agnes moving amidst the evergreens at a little distance.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, with an expression of satisfaction upon his countenance; and he entered the garden.

Without proceeding direct towards the house, he at once struck into a winding path, which in a few moments brought him to the avenue where Agnes was now rambling. She was proceeding towards the further extremity: her back was turned to the visitor—and she was unconscious of his presence. He had leisure to regard the sylphid form that was before him,—to mark that sculptured slope of the shoulders—that slenderness of the waist—those hyperion tresses which shone like gold when they fluttered forth beyond the shade of the large hat. And now Agnes stooped to examine some flowers upon the border; and Hardress caught a glimpse of the beautifully shaped feet and the delicately rounded ankles. A few moments afterwards Agnes reached a spot where there was a large statue of Diana upon a pedestal; and she stood to contemplate it. We have already said that there were several statues interspersed about the garden,—some having been selected according to the taste of Floribel, some according to that of Agnes. This one of which we are speaking was in the latter category; and as it was a very beautiful work of art, the young lady seldom passed it without pausing for a few moments to contemplate it. It does not require a very fanciful imagination to discern something allegorical in the scene itself—that beautiful maiden gazing upon that admirable statue! For was there no type in the Goddess of Chastity which applied to Agnes herself? Yes—it was so: but Hector Hardress, though tolerably well read in the classics, possessed not a mind of a sufficiently delicate texture to be struck by the truthful force of that natural allegory.

Agnes now heard a footstep advancing; and looking around she beheld the Hon. Hector Hardress. It was in the very nature of her artless

disposition to be at most times self-possessed and composed; and thus it was even scarcely with a start that she became aware of his presence; while it seemed perfectly natural that on calling to pay a visit, and perceiving her to be in the garden, he should join her there. Yet if there were in the mind of Agnes any thought at the instant more prominent than another, it was a slight sentiment of surprise that Hardress should not have sought her cousin in the drawing-room; for bearing in mind the cold reserve which she had for weeks maintained towards Hector, and which had only recently worn off—recollecting too that it was Floribel who generally sustained the conversation with him when it turned upon operas and novels and other superficialities—Agnes naturally conceived that Mr. Hardress preferred her cousin's society to her own.

"Perhaps I ought to apologize, Miss Evelyn," said Hector, after a few observations had been exchanged, "for making my appearance at such an hour at your abode: but I confess that I had a fixed object in view."

"Indeed, Mr. Hardress?" said Agnes, wondering what that object could be, but almost inclined to think it would prove some frivolous triviality.

"Yes, Miss Evelyn," he continued, "I have a purpose which I can no longer defer, and yet even now I scarcely know in what manner to approach the subject. Pray be patient with me! It is impossible that for three months I could have visited at Sidney Villa without becoming deeply sensible of the beauty of one who is in every way worthy of my regard. To behold that one—to be frequently in her society—to enjoy her conversation—to listen to the tones of her voice—Ah! I should be possessed of a heart of stone if I had remained unsusceptible of all those influences!"

Agnes thought to herself, "He loves Floribel; and he chooses to consult me before he avows himself to her. It is kind—it is delicate—it is discreet on his part!"

"What answer may I expect, Miss Evelyn?" continued Hector. "Dare I indulge in a hope?—may I venture to flatter myself that I shall not be doomed to the bitterness of disappointment?"

"I thank you, Mr. Hardress," responded Agnes, with a soft maidenly dignity, blending with a greater friendliness of manner than she had ever yet displayed towards him, "for the compliment you are paying me, and for the honour which you are conferring upon me, by addressing me thus in the first instance. But I know not how to answer you—unless it be by putting a preliminary question."

"Oh, ask me anything," exclaimed Hector, whose inward rapture was so great as almost to subdue the enthusiasm of his tone; "and rest assured that I will deal frankly and candidly with you!"

Hardress rose still higher in the lady's estimation; and every lingering influence (if any there still were) of the anonymous letter passed away from her mind.

"The question I would put, Mr. Hardress," proceeded Agnes, "is whether your parents, Lord and Lady Mendlesham, are acquainted with the step you are now taking?"

"Frankly, Miss Evelyn, they are not," rejoined Hector. "In the first place I felt it to be un-



necessary to open my heart to them, until I had previously acquired the certainty that my suit would not be unacceptable to its adored object. Secondly, my father has his pride, and his prejudices: these cannot be overcome in a moment—it will be the work of a little time—and caution on my part is all the more necessary inasmuch as during my father's lifetime I am totally dependent on his purse for my income."

"You speak candidly, Mr. Hardress," said Agnes, in a tone of approval; "and your conduct is honourable and straightforward. But still that pride and those prejudices to which you have alluded——"

"Ah, Miss Evelyn!" exclaimed Hector, "where is the love that is happy enough to have no obstacles to encounter? Can its sincerity be believed in if it exists not in spite of them?—and is not its very strength to be proven by its success in surmounting them? I had flattered myself!"

No. 5.—AGNES.

and here it struck Agnes that his voice assumed a certain tenderness which ought perhaps more properly to have been reserved for the moment when he should address himself to Floribel—"I had flattered myself that if this love of mine were reciprocated, there need be but little delay in the consummation of my happiness. I allude to a private marriage——"

"No—never!" exclaimed Agnes emphatically. "I am convinced that Floribel——"

"Pray listen to me, Miss Evelyn!" interrupted Hector emphatically. "Your cousin Miss Lister might object: but there are a thousand arguments in favour of that course. I am of age—the marriage would be a legal one—and I have no right to sacrifice my happiness to the pride or prejudices of parents. Again, during the time that the concealment of such an union might be necessary until I should have prepared Lord and Lady Maudslam for the intelligence, my means are amply

sufficient for the proper maintenance of her who would thus become my beloved bride. In a word——"

"Enough, Mr. Hardress," said Agnes, firmly yet kindly: "your reasonings, however well meant—and I give you credit for the most honourable sincerity—have failed to convince me. You have sought my opinion; and I now give it. Never with my concurrence shall Floribel——"

"Floribel?" ejaculated Hardress, stopping short in his walk with Agnes along the shady avenue; and his look suddenly became full of bewildered astonishment.

"Yes, Mr. Hardress," continued Agnes—though at a loss to conceive the cause of his strange looks; "I never could counsel my cousin to become your's by a clandestine alliance. And remember, I am by no means confident that she regards you otherwise than as a mere friendly acquaintance. I hope that in the circumstances in which you are placed in regard to your parents, you will not speak to Floribel on the subject——"

"Good heaven! is it possible that such an error should have existed all this time?" exclaimed Hardress. "It is not Floribel whom I love!—it is not your cousin who has won my heart! It is you, adored and beautiful Agnes!—it is yourself!"

For a few instants Miss Evelyn gazed upon Hector with a look of mingled bewilderment and alight: then she suddenly became filled with confusion, the roses blushing upon her cheeks: but by a transition as rapid as the preceding ones, she regained her self-possession; and she said, "It was indeed an error of which I was most innocent! But while now thanking you, Mr. Hardress, in another sense——"

"Oh, Agnes!" he exclaimed, "do not destroy the hope which you have conjured up!—do not dash me down from the height of my happiness——"

"Stop, sir!" said Agnes, with maiden dignity and firmness, though without anger—for the young patrician had neither spoken nor done aught that was otherwise than flattering and complimentary to herself; "this is language to which I must not listen—because it is out of my power to give you the slightest hope or the faintest encouragement."

"Agnes!" he cried, "you are reducing me to despair! By heaven, I adore you!"—and seizing her hand, he was on the point of conveying it to his lips.

Then that young maiden of less than eighteen years of age, displayed all a woman's dignity; and exclaiming, "Release my hand, sir!" she forcibly drew it from him ere his lips had touched it.

Hardress was maddened by the intensity of his passion, as well as the pressure, though so temporary, in which he had retained that beauteous hand, so white, so soft, so warm. His eyes were devouring the transcendent loveliness of her countenance, and wandering rapidly over the faultless outlines of her shape. He was not the master of his actions. In a moment he seized her in his arms,—exclaiming, "By heaven, Agnes, you shall be mine!"

His hot breath fanned her cheek: but before that pure damask cheek of her's was polluted by the lustful kiss of his lips, the indignant girl, sud-

denly inspired with a preterhuman strength, had torn herself from his arms. At the same instant there was a crashing and rushing amidst the evergreens—some one darted forth—and as if a flash of lightning had struck him, Hardress was levelled upon the ground.

It was Charles De Vere who had thus suddenly appeared upon the scene.

Hector sprang to his feet; and with a savage cry he was about to rush at the young Government clerk,—when Agnes, who had already flung a glance full of gratitude upon Charles, exclaimed, "Dare not, Mr. Hardress, to make this place the scene of your violence!"

"No—you are right!" said Hector, in a voice hoarse with rage, while his countenance was ghastly pale and the quick workings of his features showed how deep was the concentration of his fury: then without uttering another word, he flung a look of vindictive hatred upon Charles—picked up his hat, and sped away.

We must here interrupt the thread of our narrative for a few moments to describe how it was that young De Vere had happened to make his appearance upon the spot at that particular moment. He had obtained a whole holiday from his Office; and inspired by his cherished yet untold affection for Agnes, he had repaired to the villa, without much reflection upon the somewhat early period of the day for such a visit. On arriving at the house, he learnt from Rachel that Miss Lister was not yet visible (for she had only just gone up to put off her morning *negligée*), and that Miss Evelyn was in the garden. Charles had therefore hastened to join Agnes in her ramble,—blessing his stars at the lucky prospect of finding himself alone with her. He caught a glimpse of her white drapery through the evergreens: he approached from the opposite side of the verdant barrier; and then voices met his ear. Hardress was speaking,—was speaking too of love! Charles was transfixed to the spot. He was incapable of becoming a deliberate, wilful, and premeditated listener: but he had no thought now for anything but the *one* subject which so vitally concerned him. It was the subject upon which all his earthly happiness depended! Therefore he listened. Good heavens! Hector Hardress was avowing his love to Agnes; and Agnes was not rejecting him!—her words were tantamount to an acknowledgment that his suit was not disagreeable! And now Hardress speaks of a clandestine marriage! What will Agnes reply? Charles was full of the poignant agony of suspense. Ah, she repudiates the idea with firmness—she refuses her consent! Still she loves him; and Charles is reduced to despair! No, no! she loves him not!—it is all an error—she was thinking that Hardress merely did her the honour to consult her in respect to her cousin Floribel. Joy! joy! the heart of young De Vere bounds and leaps within him. But, Ah! what is that? Hardress speaks vehemently. An insult to Agnes! Oh to punish the author of that insult!—to strike him down! And it was done.

Hector Hardress fled: Charles remained alone with Agnes. Warmly yet modestly did she express her gratitude for his chivalrous conduct; and he exclaimed in an impassioned tone that so long as he had an arm to protect her, no living being

should injure a single hair of her head. In the excitement of her feelings, and in the wild apprehension which had now sprung up in her mind, Agnes did not catch the full significance of that declaration; and she hastened to say in a voice of tremulous entreaty, "Promise me, Mr. De Vere—promise me, I conjure you, that this incident shall have no unpleasant results?"

The words of Agnes suddenly reminded Charles of the position in which he now stood towards Hector Hardress; and he was smitten with the conviction that a duel must be the inevitable consequence. But without absolutely pledging himself to reject any hostile cartel that might be sent to him, De Vere said a thousand hurried things to assuage Miss Evelyn's alarm; and the impression he thus succeeded in making upon her mind, was to the effect that her wishes should be attended to. She herself was now satisfied: for she knew too little of the imperious nature of the world's barbaric "code of honour" to be aware that if Charles refused to accept a challenge he would be branded as a coward.

Oh! gladly would young De Vere have availed himself of this opportunity to avow his love for Agnes: but the natural delicacy of his mind made him reflect that the moment was most inopportune, and that such a procedure on his part would be taking an ungenerous advantage of the service which he had rendered the young maiden. Yet it was evident, from the manner in which she now addressed him, that they were suddenly placed on a footing of friendly intimacy which was very different from the mere acquaintanceship that had previously subsisted. Charles felt that it was already a great point gained; and his heart beat with exultation at the thought of having been enabled to render so signal a service to the beautiful creature whom he adored.

"And now, Mr. De Vere," she said, still trembling with the effects of recent agitation, the sense of an insult received, and that fear of the consequences to its avenger which had only just been assuaged,—“you will not think me rude if I ask you to leave me. I must tell all this to my cousin; and I would fain be alone with her when I speak of the ungentelemanly conduct of one person and the noble generosity of another.”

"Yes, I will leave you, Miss Evelyn," replied Charles: and for a moment he pressed the fair soft hand which had been snatched away from his rival, but which was now, in all the frankness of an ingenuous gratitude, extended towards himself.

"And remember," added Agnes impressively, while there was a pathetic earnestness in her beautiful blue eyes as well as in the liquid tones of her sweet voice,—“remember, Mr. De Vere, that there are to be no serious consequences from the deplorable incident of this day.”

"None, Miss Evelyn!" he exclaimed: and then, as he turned away from her, he added, but in a voice inaudible to herself, "Not if consistently with mine own honour I can adhere to the assurance I have given you, beloved and beautiful Agnes!"

There had been nothing in the looks, the words, or the manner of the young lady to inspire Charles with the conviction that his passion was reciprocated; but still there was some secret voice whis-

pering in his soul, which seemed to give him the assurance that he was not an object of indifference to her. They were already placed upon terms of a friendly intimacy; and the way in which she had thanked him for his chivalrous intervention on her behalf, was replete with the most fervid gratitude. It is true that gratitude and friendship are not the component parts of love: but still they frequently prove the stepping-stones by which the soul advances towards the shrine of the softer sentiment. Such was the reflection which the young Government clerk made as he issued forth from the grounds of Sidney Villa.

Endeavouring to compose his looks as much as possible, and to banish from them the reflection of that tell-tale joy which he was very far from wishing to banish from his heart, he bent his steps homeward. The front door had a handle by which he could let himself in; and he was proceeding to the parlour to inform his mother that he had a holiday, when he stopped short on hearing her voice speaking inside that room with a tone of unusual excitement.

"Again, then—and for the last time will I yield to you!" Mrs. De Vere was saying. "But understand me well! my mind is made up—my determination is taken——"

Another voice interposed something—but what it was Charles could not catch; and hearing the handle of the door move as if some one were about to issue forth, he retreated into the opposite apartment; for if he were caught standing there, it might be fancied that he was playing the part of an eavesdropper. In a few moments he heard some one leave the house; and looking through the window, he instantaneously recognised that sinister-looking old woman who three months back had sought an interview with his mother. Until this moment it had never struck Charles otherwise than that Mrs. Chicklade had been the object of mere charity on his mother's part: but now he was astonished and bewildered as he reflected that there must be something like extortion in her proceedings. It was not so much the abstract sense of the words which he had just heard fall from Mrs. De Vere's lips: but it was the excited tone in which they were uttered that engendered his suspicion. The words themselves might merely have conveyed a remonstrance for the renewal of a mendicant application to a source whence relief had been on a former occasion afforded: but it was so unlike his mother to address harsh or peremptory language to any one—especially an unfortunate creature in whose better days she had known her.

But while these reflections were passing rapidly through the mind of the young clerk, Mrs. De Vere entered the room. She started; and an ejaculation in which there seemed to be something even more than surprise, burst from her lips—while Charles noticed that for an instant she wore a strange ghastly look.

"My dear mother," he cried, bounding towards her, "something has happened to annoy you? That old woman——"

"When did you return, Charles?" demanded Mrs. De Vere abruptly: "when did you come in?"

"Not three minutes ago," replied the young man.

"And perhaps you sought me in the other parlour?" said Mrs. De Vere, endeavouring to prevent her looks and tone from betraying the strong feverish anxiety with which she put the question.

"Yes," answered Charles: "but I heard the sound of your voice—you were speaking excitedly—I was afraid of being thought a listener—and I came in here."

"And you heard me say," gasped Mrs. De Vere,—"you heard me saying something——"

"Frankly, my dear mother," rejoined the young man, astonished and pained by this scene, "I heard you tell that woman that it was for the last time—that you were determined—and that your mind was made up. I heard no more."

"Ah!" said Mrs. De Vere, with a deep sigh indicative of the strong relief which that assurance had conveyed to her.

"But tell me, dear mother," ejaculated Charles, "what all this means. Surely that woman has no reason for threatening or extorting——"

"No, no, my dear boy!" interrupted Mrs. De Vere; "what reason *could* she possibly have? But misery has rendered her desperate—she spoke of suicide—in short, I know not what——"

"Ah, now I understand!" cried Charles, fancying that he had obtained a complete reading of that which a moment before was a painful and bewildering mystery. "She threatened you in that sense—it is not an uncommon mode of procedure with such persons—and you yielded to the species of extortion! You did right to say that your mind was made up, and that you were relieving her for the last time! Should she repeat her visit, I should advise you not to see her."

"No—I will not again see her," answered Mrs. De Vere. "But what brings you home so soon to day?"

"The senior of my office gave me a holiday," responded Charles: "and I thought that you might probably like to take a walk on this beautiful afternoon."

Mrs. De Vere agreed to the proposition: and they went out together. They remained absent for about a couple of hours; and on their return to Belmont Cottage, Margaret, the parlour-maid, said to Charles, "If you please, sir, a gentleman has just been to call upon you: he has left his card—and he says that if you will favour him with a visit in the course of the evening he shall be at home to receive you."

It instantaneously struck young De Vere that the call of this gentleman was connected with the incident that had occurred in the grounds of Sidney Villa: for the card which Margaret placed in his hand, bore a name with which he was utterly unacquainted. Charles however exercised the completest mastery over his feelings and his countenance; and assuming a careless tone, he said, "Ah, Captain Fitzherbert! I recollect!—I was introduced to him the other day by one of my brother-clerks."

"But what can he possibly want with you, Charles?" asked Mrs. De Vere, as she and her son entered the parlour together, and the housemaid retired. "I hope it is not to engage you at any party of young men whose means are perhaps much greater than your's—Besides, Charles, you must not accept hospitalities without return-

ing them—and you know that I cannot receive company at the Cottage."

"Oh, no, my dear mother!" he exclaimed: "I am sure it is for no purpose of that kind; because I am not intimate enough with this Captain Fitzherbert to be invited as his friend. In short, I do not know what he can possibly want with me—unless it be to procure some information which the papers in my office may be enabled to afford."

"Ah!" said Mrs. De Vere, her countenance brightening up, because not for an instant could she suppose that her son was deceiving her: "it is doubtless as you have just surmised."

"I will call upon Captain Fitzherbert after dinner," said Charles.

It pained the young man more than we can describe to play this part of duplicity towards his mother: but there was really no help for it. That he was to be challenged to a duel seemed only too evident. He must accept that cartel for his honour's sake: but if he were to drop the slightest hint thereof to Mrs. De Vere, he knew that in the frenzy of her alarm she would be certain to adopt measures to prevent it. It cost him no mean effort to continue in the maintenance of a complete mastery over his countenance, so as to prevent the betrayal of his feelings throughout dinner-time; and it was with equal difficulty that he could force himself to partake of the repast. Not that young De Vere was a coward;—very far from it! He possessed the highest spirit and the most chivalric courage: but still he could not blind himself to the fact that his life was to be imperilled—and if it were lost, good heavens! what would be the anguish of his poor mother? It was for *her* therefore that his inward feelings were racking him; and when he gazed upon her countenance—when he met the regards of fondest maternal affection that were from time to time bent upon him—his soul was smitten with the sensation as if of a death-like sickness. Nevertheless by a series of almost preternatural efforts he continued so to bear himself as to prevent Mrs. De Vere from entertaining any suspicion that his mind was thus troubled.

It was a little after six o'clock when Charles De Vere, rising from the table, bade his mother a temporary farewell, and issued from the house to call upon Captain Fitzherbert, whose address, as indicated by his card, was in Jermyn Street, St. James's. As Charles passed by Sidney Villa, his spirits were cheered, while apostrophizing the image of one of its beautiful inmates, he inwardly ejaculated, "Ah, Agnes! it is for your sake that my life is to be endangered!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUEL.

ON reaching Jermyn Street, Charles De Vere found that Captain Fitzherbert only inhabited lodgings over a perfumer's shop; and he therefore concluded that this personage was an unmarried man. The private door was opened by a young page in a handsome livery: and the moment Charles announced his name, the youthful domestic conducted him up-stairs to a handsomely furnished

apartment, where a gentleman was seated alone at his dessert.

This was Captain Fitzherbert. He was a short, thin, red-haired man—about thirty years of age; he was dressed fashionably, but with perfect good taste; and he rose with a kind of reserved courtesy to receive his visitor.

"Pray be seated, Mr. De Vere," said Captain Fitzherbert, indicating a chair. "You have perhaps already surmised for what purpose I called at your house. I did not of course leave any explanatory message with the domestic; and I am glad that you have come this evening, as all the arrangements can be made for a meeting to-morrow morning. In a word, Mr. De Vere, the Hon. Mr. Hardress has honoured me by naming me as his friend on the occasion."

"Perhaps, Captain Fitzherbert," said our young hero, "you will be good enough to instruct me in the course which I have to pursue; for this is the first affair of the kind in which I have ever been concerned—and I am completely ignorant of the usual mode of proceeding."

"Mr. De Vere," answered Captain Fitzherbert, "I learn from my principal that you have grievously insulted him—pray do not interrupt me, sir!—it is not the duty of a second to discuss the merits of a case like this: it is sufficient for me to know that the Hon. Mr. Hardress considers himself to be sorely aggrieved—and the alternatives for you to decide between are an ample written apology or a hostile meeting."

"An apology, Captain Fitzherbert," replied Charles, "is impossible; because that would be expressive of a sense of wrong-doing on my part: whereas—"

"Enough, Mr. De Vere!" interrupted the officer: "explanations are needless. It is sufficient that you decline to apologize. You have now therefore to name some friend whom you can put in immediate communication with me; and we will make every arrangement for the meeting at an early hour to-morrow morning. By the bye, there are convenient places in the neighbourhood of your own residence; and if your second shall prove agreeable, we will select one of them. You will have the less distance to proceed; and this will avoid the necessity of your leaving the house at an hour so early as to excite the suspicions of Mrs. De Vere."

"But I really know not any friend," exclaimed Charles, "to whom I can address myself for such a purpose."

"Surely, Mr. De Vere," rejoined Fitzherbert, "there must be some gentleman in your Office—"

"Yes—I know one!" ejaculated Charles. "But suppose that any disagreeable consequences were to ensue—would it not be better that the name of the young lady herself should be spared the annoyance of publicity?"

"The very thing, Mr. De Vere, which I was about to propose to you!" interjected Captain Fitzherbert. "In case of either yourself or Mr. Hardress being wounded—or anything worse—the rest may be compelled to fly to the Continent for a time; and as we only could tell the tale, there may be a solemn agreement amongst us to remain silent upon the subject. This is the desire of Mr. Hardress; and I am glad to perceive that it is

your own likewise. In short, the affair is an unfortunate one; and as the world generally gives its own colouring to tales of this description, if they transpire, it were infinitely better that silence should be altogether observed in the matter."

Charles, having cordially expressed his approval of the resolution thus arrived at, took his departure. He had bethought himself of a gentleman named Summers, who was in the same Office with himself—and with whom, of all his brother-clerks, he was most intimate. Mr. Summers was a single man, some three or four years older than De Vere; and the latter had happened to recollect that the other was once engaged in an affair similar to that in which he himself was now involved. Mr. Summers resided in the neighbourhood of Soho, at no very great distance from Jernyn Street; and thither Charles repaired. He found his friend at his lodgings: he told him everything that had occurred—but likewise taking care to mention the agreement which had been settled in respect to the total suppression of Miss Evelyn's name in connexion with the cause of the quarrel. Mr. Summers—though with considerable reluctance, on account of his friend's youth—at length consented to act on his behalf; and certain preliminaries having been agreed upon, so as to prevent the necessity of any farther communication that evening between the two, our young hero took his departure.

It was past nine o'clock when he reached Belmont Cottage; and again was he compelled to exercise a powerful control over himself when re-appearing in the presence of his mother. Painful as it was to him, he was still necessitated to continue in the course of duplicity on which he had already entered; and he assured Mrs. De Vere that his surmise was correct, and that Captain Fitzherbert had the most particular need for some information which certain papers in the Office to which Charles belonged could alone afford. Mrs. De Vere was satisfied—though she thought it singular that Captain Fitzherbert should have given her son so much trouble when seeking a favour for himself: but still this idea on her part did not even amount to a misgiving—still less to a suspicion that there was anything wrong.

Charles retired to his chamber—having as usual embraced his mother; and there was the sickening thought in his mind that perhaps it was for the last time he had thus imprinted a kiss upon her cheek! Indeed when alone in his apartment, he could scarcely keep back his tears, as he reflected that within a few hours he might possibly be lying maimed or wounded, or even a stark corpse, in that very bed which he was now about to seek. We should however observe that there was one point on which he was spared all anxiety. This was in respect to the pecuniary position of his mother: for as she had an income of her own, of about two hundred pounds a year, the loss of his salary, in case the worst should happen, would not plunge her into poverty.

Before he retired to rest, he wrote two letters—one addressed to his mother, the other to Miss Evelyn. In the former he conjured his parent to forgive him for the duplicity which he had practised towards her, and which only had arisen from the necessity of adopting every precaution to prevent an interference in respect to the pending

duel, which would cast suspicion upon his courage and tarnish his honour. In the other letter he delicately avowed his love to Agnes,—declaring that when at the last moment he should stand in the presence of his enemy, her name would be coupled with that of his mother in the prayer that he should be breathing to heaven; and he likewise beaught that she would now and then devote a thought to the memory of one who had loved her with so much silent, untold devotion. Having finished these letters, Charles felt easier in his mind: it seemed as if all earthly duties were now performed, and that naught remained but to abide the issue of the coming encounter. He retired to his bed, and slept serenely until five o'clock in the morning.

He now rose and dressed himself noiselessly; and carrying his boots in his hand—so that he might glide down the staircase with the stealthiness of a ghost—he issued from his chamber. Opposite to his own door, was that of his mother's room; and the young man could scarcely repress a suffocating sob as he thought perhaps he was doomed never again to behold that affectionate parent. Was she sleeping, dreamless even of a suspicion of the peril that awaited her son?—or was she awake, and fancying that he still slept? Charles could not help asking himself these questions; and for a moment they nearly unmanned him. But he exerted his strength of mind; and stealing down the staircase, gained the passage. There he drew on his boots; and noiselessly let himself out of the house.

It was only half-past five: he had a walk of about twenty minutes before him: and the appointment was for six o'clock. He was therefore in plenty of time; and he was the first to reach the ground—the particular place having been arranged between himself and Mr. Summers on the preceding evening. In a few minutes Summers himself appeared; and to this gentleman's charge did De Vere consign the two letters which he had written—but which, as a matter of course, were only to be delivered in case that their writer should fall in the duel.

We will now return to Belmont Cottage. Mrs. De Vere was indeed sleeping at the moment when her son was passing her chamber door to go forth to the hostile encounter. She had been for many hours awake during all the early part of the night,—her mind troubled with the image of that old harridan who seemed determined to haunt her. Mrs. De Vere had at length fallen into a slumber which was rendered all the more profound by mental exhaustion; and she slept until about half-past six o'clock. Then she rose—for it was her habit to rise early, in order to have breakfast punctually at half-past eight, so that Charles should be enabled to leave the house at nine, and thus allow himself an hour to walk to the Home Office, where his duties commenced at ten.

When Margaret was summoned, as usual, to assist at her mistress's toilet, she intimated that Mr. De Vere must have gone out for a walk; for his chamber door was ajar, and the front door was unlocked. Charles was seldom in the habit of walking out before breakfast, for the simple reason that he had the prospect of so long a walk afterwards: but even when he did stroll forth ere the morning meal was served up, it was never at so

early an hour as half-past six. Mrs. De Vere now entertained some little misgiving: then she thought of that visit from Captain Fitzherbert, and of her son's absence for more than three hours in the evening. It struck her likewise that there had been something peculiar in his manner at dinner-time and after his return from his visit to Captain Fitzherbert. She recalled several little peculiarities of look and abstractions which had not made any particular impression on her at the time, but all of which now came trooping rapidly in upon her recollection. The longer she reflected, the more alarmed she grew: there was the idea of a duel vaguely floating in her mind; but she could not settle herself to the belief that Charles had by any possibility become involved in such a peril.

With increasing uneasiness Mrs. De Vere rapidly performed her toilet; and she descended from her chamber to look forth anxiously from the front door in the hope of beholding her son. It was now only seven o'clock; and she thought to herself that if he had indeed gone merely for a ramble, he might not return until breakfast-time, which was half-past eight; and thus she would be compelled to endure the growing horror of this suspense for a mortal hour and a half. In a few minutes he made his appearance: he was hurrying along, unconscious that his mother was at the cottage door awaiting him. There was confusion in his brain—ghastliness in his looks; while his step was uneven as if he were intoxicated. Mrs. De Vere bounded forward to the gate, with a half-stifled cry of alarm upon her lips; and the sound reaching the ears of her son, instantaneously recalled him to a sense of his position. Then was it that with the exertion of a preterhuman effort he suddenly became calm and collected in his manner and bearing; though an ashy whiteness, as if of lingering terror or horror, remained upon his countenance. Mrs. De Vere dared not ask him a question: his presence had to a certain extent relieved her from the suspense she had been enduring; and as she now beheld two or three labourers approaching on the way to their work, she passed into the house, Charles following her.

"You look annoyed, my dear mother," he said, affecting his wonted light-hearted cheerfulness and youthful gaiety. "Perhaps you were surprised that I went out earlier than usual? But the morning was so beautiful—the air was so fresh—and the birds were singing so sweetly, as if unconscious that the hand of Autumn had tinged the leaves of the trees——"

"Charles, my dear boy!" ejaculated Mrs. De Vere, who, having closed the parlour door, now advanced up to him, fixing her eyes half reproachfully, half anxiously upon his countenance; "for heaven's sake cease these duplicities—and be my own candid, frank-speaking, ingenuous son once again! What have you been doing?"

"I, mother?"—and the young man endeavoured to send forth that light laugh of merry juvenescence, which, when he was really gay and cheerful, was wont to ring in masculine melody from his lips: "merely enjoying the loveliness of the morning——"

"Charles, it is false!" interrupted Mrs. De Vere, with an excitement and a vehemence which surprised and startled the young man. "You

must not continue to practise this deceitfulness. Good heavens! how could you have become so changed? There was a time until very recently when every syllable you spoke carried the conviction of truth! But tell me, Charles,—drive me not mad!—tell me what you have been doing?”

“My dear mother, compose yourself! Why—why,” faltered the young man, —“why do you—”

“Why do I excite myself thus?” ejaculated Mrs. De Vere. “It is you yourself that are goading me in this manner! O, Charles! I have endured the most frightful suspense—”

“My poor mother!”—and the youth, bursting into tears, strained her to his breast, embracing her with even a vehemence—or we might say a violence of fervid feeling. “And you have suffered on my account—and all because I absented myself—”

“No, Charles!” exclaimed Mrs. De Vere, suddenly disengaging herself from the warmth of that filial embrace to all the sweet luxury of which she had for a moment yielded: “it was not simply because you absented yourself—but because there was something sinister and suspicious in that absence! Why came Captain Fitzherbert hither?—why the mystery of his visit? What could he want with you? Confess the truth, Charles! You have—you have—Oh! I shudder to give utterance to the words!”

“Mother, tranquilize yourself, I entreat!” he exclaimed, now terribly agitated.

“Charles!” she said, as if in a voice of solemn adjuration, “you have been fighting a duel!”

The young man started back in such a way that the very movement itself, even more than the ghastly look which accompanied it, sent an instantaneous conviction of the truth of her surmise fleeing in unto the brain of his mother.

“Ah, I thought so!” she wildly cried. “My God, that you should have risked your life!—that life on which my own depends! O Charles, you know not how dear you are to me! But, Ah!” she literally shrieked forth. “what is this upon your sleeve! Blood! Just heavens, ‘tis blood!”

“Not my own, mother!” exclaimed her fearfully excited son: “nor am I a murderer—for my opponent in the duel is but slightly wounded! Yet, Oh! the wild horror of my feelings when I saw that he was wounded—but knowing not where, fancied that it might be mortal! Oh, mother!” he said, “if you knew the anguish I have endured, you would consider it sufficient punishment for any duplicity on my part towards yourself!—you would not upbraid and reproach me now!”

These words were uttered in accents of such earnest appeal—in tones so plaintively touching—that Mrs. De Vere’s heart melted towards her son; and with the tears trickling from her eyes, she caught him in her arms.

“No, my poor boy!” she murmured: “I will not reproach you any more. I feel convinced that you must have suffered deeply! Yes—and I am likewise confident that there must have been some strong provocation—some fearful outrage committed—”

“It was so, my dear mother. Listen!” exclaimed Charles. “I was returning home yesterday, when I beheld a gentleman—a gentleman,

as he is at least by birth and name—grossly insulting a young lady. What could I do? I did that which any man of even the most ordinary spirit would have done: I levelled him to the earth. Ah, my dear mother!—suppose that you had a daughter who had been placed in the position of that young lady, you would have been unable to find language sufficient to express your gratitude towards him who might have avenged her insulted innocence! Nay, more—you would have admired him for his conduct! Well, mother, no more than this have I done: it was a duty—and I performed it. I did not tell you on my return home what had happened: I spared your feelings, for I had my suspicion of what would be the consequences; and I was determined to meet them boldly. I have done so. I myself am unhurt: yet heaven forbid that I should ever again be hurried through such an ordeal! I take God to witness that I studied to fire wide of my antagonist: and yet I hit him! He is wounded in the arm—but only slightly—so slightly indeed that the surgeon who was present declares he will soon be well.”

“But the penalties for this duel, my dear boy?” said Mrs. De Vere, who at one time was weeping with anguish, and at another gazing up at him with a mother’s true pride and admiration: “the consequences—”

“There is nothing to fear,” he answered. “Not a soul will whisper a syllable in respect to this duel. It was agreed beforehand that naught should be said; and as the result is so comparatively trivial, it is all the more easy for that agreement to be adhered to. My antagonist will keep his room for a few days: a fall from his horse, or some other pretext, will be the alleged cause; and all will be over.”

“Heaven be thanked that it is no worse!” murmured Mrs. De Vere with a sensation of indescribable relief. “Oh, my dear boy! how can I possibly blame you? You have put the case in language as nobly eloquent as your own conduct was admirable, and as your courage has been chivalrous. But tell me, Charles—this antagonist of yours—who was he?”

“His name, my dear mother, is far from unfamiliar to your ears—and this is the most distressing part of the transaction! Of all men he is almost the last with whom I would have willingly or wilfully sought a quarrel—inasmuch as I am indebted to his father’s influence—”

“Charles!” cried Mrs. De Vere, with another half-stifled shriek, and with a look which seemed to have horror in it: “what mean you? Unhappy boy! is it possible—”

“Mother!” exclaimed our young hero, speaking passionately, “you will drive me mad with these reiterated reproaches! I tell you that it was not my fault; and I ought scarcely to blame myself even if I had ere now laid Hector Hardress dead upon the ground!”

“Oh, my God! my God!” murmured Mrs. De Vere, clasping her hands in indescribable anguish as she sank upon a seat: “to think that this blood”—and she pointed to her son’s coat-sleeve—“should be his!”

An idea of some horrible mystery, yet vague and bewildering, emote the mind of the young man; and he exclaimed, “Good heavens, mother!

you look and speak as if I had perpetrated some appalling crime! There is not even ingratitude in the deed: for I sought it not—it was forced upon me. Tell me what is passing in your thoughts?"

"Nothing, Charles—nothing more than what you can too well fancy," responded his afflicted mother. "My ideas are all in confusion! But tell me, are you convinced—positively convinced—that Hardress will not speak of this—not even to his father—not even to his own nearest and dearest relatives?"

"I am convinced he will not!" replied De Vere. "He proclaimed as much just now, when in an agony of grief I sustained him in my arms. No—he will not! Tranquillize yourself therefore, my dear mother! Lord Mendlesham will never learn that he for whom his kind interest provided, has confronted his son in the deadly duel. Besides, Hector Hardress would not for his own credit's sake have the incident published abroad: for it would redound little to his honour that he was thus chastised for an insult to a young lady. If the fear of my being charged with black ingratitude be all that is now in your mind——"

"It is all, my dear boy!" answered Mrs. De Vere, still hurriedly and excitedly: "it is indeed all! And, Oh! instead of repining thus, and seeming to reproach you, I ought to go down upon my knees and thank God that you are restored to me uninjured!"

The mother and son now once more embraced each other; and for the present we will leave them, in order to direct the attention of our readers to the next scene which marks the course of our narrative.

It was a few hours later on that same day—in deed, to be more particular in respect to time, it was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, that Floribel Lister was receiving visitors in the garden of Sidney Villa. The young lady was seated on a sofa in the shade of an arbour which had been fitted up under her own auspices, and in the immediate neighbourhood of which she had caused to be placed a beautiful statuary group representing Venus and Cupid. When we beheld Agnes contemplating the effigy of Diana, we suggested an allegorical fancy:—we asked whether there were nothing typical in the inanimate statue itself, relative to the lovely maiden who at the time was surveying it? May we not now offer a kindred suggestion in reference to Floribel?—may we not ask whether the vicinage of the Goddess of Pleasure was not typical of the luxuriant appearance of that beautiful girl who was now seated upon the sofa in the well-appointed arbour?

Floribel was elegantly dressed. Her raven hair fell in massive tresses upon her bare shoulders of sculptural beauty, and upon the bosom which the low *corsage* almost half exposed. The scarf which she had at first thrown on to cover those nude shoulders and that voluptuous exposure of the bust, had fallen as if quite by accident—though in reality there was the studied refinement of a coquettish art in its intentional removal. It now lay in graceful negligence upon her arm, as if she were utterly unconscious that it had quitted its proper resting-place. Yet it was really through no improper wish to display her charms that she had done this: the act itself might seem some-

what meretricious—but the intention was so far venial, if not absolutely pure, that it was merely a giddy inconsiderate coquetry. It assorted somewhat too with that half-air of languor which was constitutional with Floribel, and which, if a scarf got displaced or a book fell, rendered her too indolent to readjust the former or to pick up the latter.

She was in company with three young gentlemen, who had all happened to call at the same time; and as she had told Rachel that she would receive any visitors in the arbour—to which she was about to retire with her book, after the performance of her toilet—they were shown thither accordingly. The last-comer was a handsome, dark-haired person, about three and twenty—with somewhat luxuriant whiskers carefully curled, and with a Grecian profile. Scarcely had he paid his respects to Miss Lister, and nodded familiarly to the other two gentlemen—with whom he was intimate—than the Hon. Mr. Clifford (for such was his name) assumed an air of mysterious confidence, evidently having some piece of intelligence to impart.

"I'll be bound," said the youngest of the three gentlemen, who had been leaning over the back of the sofa on which Floribel was seated, and who had a slight moustache, brown hair, and a foolish insipid look,—“I'll be bound that our friend Clifford has some grand secret to tell us.”

“A secret, my dear Lowden,” replied Mr. Clifford, “that you would like very much to know; for of all the scandalous gossiping fellows I ever met with, you are the very worst.”

This retort created a laugh, in which no one more cordially joined than the silly object of it himself.

“Well, what is this secret of yours, Clifford?” asked the third gentleman—or rather nobleman, for he bore the title of Viscount Mervyn; and as he sat in a chair just in front of Floribel, the sunbeams gave a reddish hue to his hair, his whiskers, and his moustache, which were all naturally light in colour.

“I must promise,” said Mr. Clifford, “that it is indeed a very great secret; and you must all faithfully promise that you will not breathe a syllable of it elsewhere.”

“Oh! we will all promise,” said Floribel, leughing with a languishing sweetness; “though I dare say it is only some piece of tittle-tattle which you, Mr. Clifford, have picked up in the course of your morning calls.”

“I can assure you, Miss Lister,” answered the gentleman thus addressed, “it is no silly gossip: it is a sterling and substantial fact. It was whispered to me by a friend of mine—a surgeon whom I will not name—whose services were enlisted in the case, and which services were to some little extent required. Now really there must be no repeating the information I am giving you; because this friend of mine, the surgeon, would not for the world have it suspected that he was the author——”

“You are talking of a duel, I declare!” exclaimed Mr. Lowden, at the top of a cracked voice, and at the same time caressing his incipient moustache.

“Positively a duel!” said Lord Mervyn, fastidiously playing with the point of his own far more



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luxuriant moustache. "On my soul! This is remarkable—very remarkable—positively!"

"A duel and nothing else," rejoined the Hon. Mr. Clifford, whose handsome Grecian countenance seemed really too intelligent to belong to one who was thus enacting the part of a petty scandal-monger. "And who do you think were the principals? We all know them both—one very intimately—the other as a casual acquaintance whom we have had the honour of meeting at Sydney Villa."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Floribel, now smitten with a suspicion; for her cousin had told her on the previous day of the conduct of Hector Hardress and of the gallant interference of Charles De Vere.

"Yes," continued Mr. Clifford, "they are two acquaintances of our's: but what was the precise

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cause of the duel I am unable to say, for my friend the surgeon himself was not let into the secret. There was, however, a lady in the case. Ah, Miss Lister! how many lives have been endangered at different times, in various countries, and in all ages, on account of your sex!"

"And whose fault is it?" asked Floribel, speaking more gravely than usual: for we have already said that she was good-hearted, and she knew that her cousin Agnes would be distressed on hearing that a hostile meeting had taken place on her account.

"It is your fault—the fault of all your sex," replied Mr. Clifford, with a tender look: "for being beautiful—and captivating—and bewitching—"

"But tell us," exclaimed Mr. Lowden, "who were the principals in this affair? I am dying with curiosity—"

"Yes—dying with curiosity—positively!" interjected Lord Mervyn.

"Well, I will not keep you in suspense," resumed Clifford. "The principals were our friend Hardress and young De Vere."

Ejaculations of astonishment burst from the lips of Clifford's auditors—astonishment that was unfeigned on the part of Lowden and Lord Mervyn, but which was affected on that of Floribel. Mr. Clifford proceeded to describe that Hardress was slightly wounded—but that the whole affair was enveloped in much mystery and had been hushed up with all possible precaution. He therefore again begged his listeners to regard the matter in the light of an inviolable secret; and they faithfully promised that they would do so. Presently the young men took their leave of Floribel,—who then anxiously awaited the return of Agnes; for Miss Evelyn had gone to call upon the Timperleys.

When Agnes came back, she learnt from her cousin as much of the particulars in respect to the duel as that young lady was enabled to communicate. Agnes was deeply afflicted that the lives of two human beings should have been perilled on her account: but on the other hand there was a material solace in the reflection that the consequences had been so slight. She experienced a warmer admiration for Charles De Vere's conduct than she had ever felt before; and no doubt there was the thought in her mind that since it was fated for one of the combatants to be wounded in the encounter, it was at least a source of satisfaction to know that it was not he in whom she was naturally most interested.

Scarcely had Agnes partially recovered from the agitation into which the intelligence had thrown her—and to dispel which she had left Floribel in order that she might roam by herself in the garden—when she perceived Charles De Vere entering at the gate. The young man hastened towards her, little suspecting that she had learnt the secret of the duel: but he was at once struck by the expression of her countenance. Those beautiful features were a faithful reflex of the sentiments that were stirring in her soul: they denoted gratitude, admiration, and sorrow, all commingled.

"Mrs De Vere," she said, in a low deep voice that was full of emotion, as she proffered her hand, "I know everything; and you have perilled your life on my account!"

"And can you pardon me," he exclaimed, "for having violated the species of promise that I gave you, Miss Evelyn? But, Oh! I can assure you that it was not I who provoked the duel! I was challenged—and I was bound to accept the cartel!"

"It is rather for me," replied Agnes, still speaking with much emotion, "to implore your forgiveness that I, however unwillingly, should have been the cause——"

"Oh, speak not thus!" cried Charles: and then he checked himself, for he was about to give utterance to the enthusiastic language of love—and he was again withheld by the idea that it would not be generous to avail himself of the species of claim which circumstances had given him upon the beautiful Miss Evelyn.

They walked together for some time,—Charles affording such an account of the duel as he

thought proper to give, without entering into those details in respect to his mother which would only have rendered the narrative all the more painful for Agnes to listen to: and then he bethought himself of asking, "But how could you possibly have learnt the secret?—for we agreed amongst ourselves to keep it inviolate!"

"My cousin learnt it," replied Agnes; "but I am not at liberty to tell you how, Mr. De Vere—and I pray that you will not press me upon the point. I do not think that the tale will be repeated elsewhere; and if it should be, most sincerely do I hope that it will not act to your prejudice."

Again Charles was on the point of enthusiastically proclaiming that he cared not what might happen so long as it was for the sake of Agnes that he suffered; and again too he checked himself, giving some response that was couched in terms of mitigated fervour. When they separated, he was if possible more enamoured than ever of the beauty, the amiability, the modesty, and the generous disposition of Miss Evelyn; while she, on her part, reflected with a deeper feeling than she had before known upon the handsome countenance as well as the noble character of Charles De Vere.

CHAPTER IX.

CICELY NEALE.

THE reader will not have forgotten that the offices of Mr. Waldron, the deceased grandfather of Floribel and Agnes, were situated in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Those offices still served the purposes of a legal practitioner: but instead of the name of Waldron appearing in the passage just inside the front-door, that of Timperley was engraved on a brass plate fixed upon the door itself. The house was no longer let out in a series of offices: it was wholly in the tenancy of Mr. Timperley, who resided there with his wife and a numerous establishment of domestics.

After the suicide of Waldron—between seventeen and eighteen years anterior to the date which our story has reached—Mr. Timperley was left to wind up whatsoever legal business his deceased master had left unfinished,—it being supposed that this duty would simply consist in assorting all the various documents for their respective owners, as a preliminary to their being handed over to other solicitors. But in a short time the name of Timperley was substituted for that of Waldron on the wall of the passage; and it likewise figured with due professional qualification in the "Law List." Waldron's successor, moreover, managed to retain several of his late employer's best clients; and thus for awhile he went on, with a gradually increasing practice, much to the surprise of many who had fancied that Mr. Timperley could not possibly have been worth a shilling, much less have been enabled to command the several hundred pounds requisite to take out an attorney's certificate and carry on such a business. As years went by, the number of Mr. Timperley's clients augmented: he assumed the appearance of a well-to-do practitioner; and from this phase he gra-

diently passed into that of a wealthy one. It suited either his purpose or his inclination—perhaps both—that his offices should be beneath the same roof as his own residence: he therefore in due time became the tenant of the entire house in Lincoln's Inn Fields,—the ground-floor being set apart for business-uses, and all the upper storeys being sumptuously furnished for the private dwelling. Then was it that the brass-plate appeared upon the front-door, to announce that the mansion was in the entire occupancy of Mr. Timperley.

When we now again introduce Mr. Timperley to our readers, we find him to be a man about sixty-five years of age—with the same sharp, shrewd, business-like expression of countenance as heretofore—but yet with a certain blandness veiling as it were the sinister portion of that expression. The consciousness of wealth, the satisfaction which he felt at having rebuilt in his old age those fortunes which in his youth he had by improvidence hurled down, the re-enjoyment of all comforts and luxuries, and the experience of that homage which in this country is ever paid to riches, no matter by whom possessed, naturally effected that partial change in Mr. Timperley's looks; so that anybody who now gazed upon him, would be impressed with the idea that he was a shrewd, keen, and business-like person, not altogether deficient in benevolence—straightforward in his dealings, and of strict integrity. Indeed, a very different being was Mr. Timperley with his blue coat and brass buttons, his buff waistcoat, his black kerseymere pantaloons, his well-polished boots, his diamond pin in his shirt-frill, his gold chain and massive seals pendant from his fob,—a very different being did he thus appear from what he was when poorly apparelled, a mean-looking, cringing, bowing clerk in the time of Joshua Waldron.

It will be remembered that the deep-laid plot in respect to the Ormsby Peerage had been religiously kept a secret by Honoria even on her death-bed; while Mr. Timperley for his own sake had as studiously concealed it. Suspicions there were at the time that something must be wrong in respect to that matter, on account of Morton Evelyn's sudden and mysterious disappearance, and of Waldron's suicide—although this latter tragedy might be attributed to the ruin of his pecuniary affairs. But those suspicions had gradually died away; and everything which related to Morton Evelyn's transient pretensions and assumptions, had now been long forgotten. Mr. and Mrs. Lister however had not liked Timperley; and thus they confided not their affairs to his professional keeping. Not that they knew of anything positively wrong against him: but they had shared at the time in the general misgivings respecting the affair of the Ormsby Peerage, and they knew that if Mr. Waldron were himself guilty of any underhand work in the business, Timperley as his confidential clerk could not possibly have been innocent. During Mr. Lister's lifetime, he and Timperley were merely upon speaking terms: but after his death the lawyer contrived to ingratiate himself, by a great show of sympathy and kindness, to some little degree into Mrs. Lister's favour—yet not sufficiently so as to induce her to leave him the guardian of her daughter and niece. He had however displayed no animosity—what-

ever he might have inwardly felt—at a proof of distrust which, as the successor of the deceased Waldron, he might have regarded as an actual insult and flagrant slight: but, on the contrary, he exhibited the most benevolent interest on behalf of the young ladies. He even wished that they should altogether take up their abode beneath his roof: but this was an arrangement to which Floribel would not for a moment consent. We should however observe that with respect to the guardianship of the young ladies, no arrangement had been made by Mrs. Lister at all: for she herself had perished too suddenly, by means of a crushing malady, to take the requisite step for such a purpose. All that she had done at some previous time was to settle her pecuniary affairs in such a way that through the medium of a banker her daughter and her niece should become her co-heiresses. Therefore it was merely in this disposal of those pecuniary interests that Mr. Timperley had any reason to feel slighted or offended, if he thought at all upon the matter.

The lawyer's wife was about ten years younger than himself, and consequently midway between fifty and sixty at the time of which we are now writing. They had been married since their youthful period, when he was in the enjoyment of that first phase of prosperity which by his improvidence he had destroyed; and she had belonged to a very respectable family. The protracted interval of comparative poverty which she had experienced while her husband was for years a mere clerk in Waldron's employment, had not divested Mrs. Timperley of those ladylike manners, tastes, and habits, in which she had been brought up; and thus, when her husband, again restored to the "Law List," entered upon his second phase of prosperity, he had a wife who could glide naturally as it were into these changing circumstances. When once established at their house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, they gave parties; and Mrs. Timperley performed the duties of a hostess with a ladylike courtesy. Floribel disliked them both, from the simple reason that she fancied her mother had mistrusted them: but Agnes, more inclined to judge generously where there was no positive ground for entertaining suspicion, felt grateful for the attentions she and her cousin received from their hands. Indeed the two young ladies were always invited to Mrs. Timperley's evening entertainments; and Floribel was too fond of society to remain away from those parties simply on account of her dislike for the persons who gave them.

The reader will recollect that Agnes had been to call at the Timperleys while Floribel was seated with her visitors in the arbour on the occasion when the Hon. Mr. Clifford revealed the secret of the duel. Agnes had a special object for paying the visit on this particular day. She had learned that an orphan niece of Mrs. Timperley had come up from the country to reside altogether with her relatives in Lincoln's Inn Fields; and therefore Miss Evelyn had deemed it only an act of courtesy to call upon that young lady. Floribel, being in one of her indolent moods, had excused herself from accompanying her cousin: but when they were seated together at the dinner-table in the evening, after the interview between Agnes and Charles De Vere, Miss Lister bethought herself of

a topic on which her curiosity for want of a better was now excited.

"You have forgotten to tell me, my dear Agnes," she said, as lounging back in her chair, she played languidly with a bunch of grapes, "about your visit to the Timperleys to-day. Did you see Miss Neale?"

"Yes," replied Agnes: "I was introduced to Miss Neale; and I have no doubt she will call upon us in a day or two."

"And what sort of a person is she?" inquired Floribel.

"Having been only half-an-hour in her society," rejoined Agnes, "I cannot very easily pass a positive opinion."

"But at least you can tell me what she is like?" said Floribel. "How old is she? is she handsome or ugly—lady-like or otherwise—tall or short—stout or thin?"

"How many more questions, my sweet cousin?" asked Agnes, with a soft smile. "But let me endeavour to answer you as well as I can. I should think that Miss Neale——"

"What is her Christian name?" inquired Floribel.

"Cicely," responded Agnes.

"A pretty name!" said Floribel. "I hope her face corresponds therewith."

"I was on the point of telling you," replied Agnes, still smiling, "that Cicely Neale is about two-and-twenty years of age, so far as I can judge. She is tall, and of very handsome shape. Without being absolutely beautiful, she is certainly good-looking. She has luxuriant hair of a light brown, which she wears gathered up in a loose knot—a style that well becomes the expression of her countenance. She has fine blue eyes——"

"You are making her out actually beautiful," interjected Floribel.

"But stop, my dear cousin!" cried Agnes, laughing. "To be very critical, I must pronounce her mouth too large—her lips too full, though not actually coarse; and then too I gladly admit that this fault is redeemed by a superb set of teeth. She seems affable, yet slightly pensive, and at times abstracted."

"Perhaps her parents have only recently died?" said Floribel.

"Her father has long been dead," answered Agnes: "her mother died nearly three years ago—indeed about the time that your poor mother, Floribel——"

"Then she is not in mourning?" said Miss Lister; "and the grief for her mother's death must have worn off? Where has she been living all this time?—and why is she only now coming to reside with her uncle and aunt?"

"She has been living somewhere near Cambridge, I believe," replied Miss Evelyn: "but your other question, Floribel, I am unable to answer. From something that Mrs. Timperley said, however, I fancy—but mind, I am not sure—that Miss Neale has been living by herself."

"And therefore, perhaps, tired of that mode of life, and the period of her mourning being some time past," said Floribel, "she has come up to London to mix in society. And she is right too!—for what would this world be if it were not for a little gaiety and recreation?"

Let us leave the two cousins in the midst of

their conversation for the present, and direct the attention of our readers to another part of the theatre of our story.

It was a couple of days after that of which we have been speaking, and at about two o'clock in the afternoon, that a tall, good-looking, well-dressed young lady was passing through Lincoln's Inn Fields. This was Cicely Neale. She has already been partially described: but we will give the picture a few more touches in order to render it complete. Miss Neale was an exceedingly fine-grown young woman, carrying herself perfectly upright, but with a graceful ease bordering upon elegance. She had a beautiful complexion, with little colour upon the cheeks—yet not of an insipid paleness. There was a certain softness of expression in her large blue eyes: but yet it did not seem to be altogether of sentiment—it bespoke some feeling which an observer could not altogether understand. The rich fulness of the lips and the roundness of the chin gave to the lower part of her countenance a certain air of sensuousness, which was however neutralized by the expression of the upper part. She was robustly formed, without bordering upon actual stoutness; her contours were full and rich, yet all the proportions being adapted to a perfect symmetry. Thus her shoulders had a fine slope—her arms were well modelled—her waist was slender—her ankles were admirably rounded—and her feet were long, narrow, and well shaped. We should add that her full pouting lips were ever habitually held slightly apart,—thus revealing a glimpse of the superb teeth which Agnes Evelyn had not failed to eulogize.

Cicely Neale had been into Holborn to make a few purchases; and she was now returning to the house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, to accompany her aunt Mrs. Timperley for an airing in her carriage. She was pursuing her way, absorbed in certain reflections that were occupying her mind; and she was thus unconscious of being the object of attention on the part of a female who, entering the square from one of the converging streets, had suddenly caught sight of her. This was none other than Mrs. Chicklade: but a great change had taken place in her appearance since we first described her. She was handsomely dressed, but with a certain degree of gauntness that ill became her sixty years, the emaciation of her frame, her sinister countenance, and her stooping gait. She riveted her reptile-like eyes upon the fine form of Cicely Neale: at first she stood still to contemplate her as if with some little degree of uncertainty in her mind; and then, suddenly convinced that she was right, she followed her. As Miss Neale did not turn her head, and was evidently unconscious of being thus the object of attention, Mrs. Chicklade accelerated her pace and speedily overtook her.

"Miss Neale!" she said, in a peculiar tone, as if asserting a fact which would not admit of dispute in case there should be an inclination to deny it.

Cicely stopped short: but the instant her gaze was bent upon the sinister-looking countenance of Mrs. Chicklade, a scarcely describable expression of disgust, annoyance, indignation, and hatred seized upon her features.

"And so you are in London, Miss?" continued

the old woman, affecting a simpering air. "Perhaps I can guess why: and if so——"

"Woman, I *will* and *can* have nothing to do with you!" interrupted Cicely, with looks and accents indicative of an abhorrence and a disgust that were becoming more and more intense.

"Perhaps you may think it well to alter your decision, Miss," said the old woman. "I have plenty of time on my hands: I have been down in the world since last I saw you—but now, thank God! I am getting up again——"

"Blaspheme not, woman!" interrupted Miss Neale indignantly. "Whatsoever you may be thankful for, must doubtless have been attained at the expense of some fellow-creature's misery."

"That is as people take it," rejoined Mrs. Chicklade, with a calmness that was in itself horrible, as if she quietly gloated over her misdeeds. "I tell you, Miss Neale, that I have time upon my hands, and that my services may be useful. You can scarcely act for yourself: you will require some one else to act for you;—and why not as well employ me, since I already know so much? In short, I am resolved that you shall enlist my services——"

"Ah! would you force your odious self upon me?" ejaculated Cicely. "Think you that I am compelled——"

"Dare you quarrel with me, Miss Neale?" asked Mrs. Chicklade, looking the young lady full in the face. "If you felt strong enough, either in your own position or in your own purpose, to reject and scorn me, would you have remained standing here for five minutes exchanging these words with me?"

Cicely seemed to be struck by the speech thus addressed to her, as if there were indeed truth in it, and as if it revealed to her the full sense of her own weakness of position or purpose, whichever it might be. She reflected for a few moments; and then she said, "Yes—I may have some questions to put to you. But we cannot linger in conversation here. Call upon me to-morrow, precisely at twelve o'clock."

"To-morrow is Sunday, Miss," said the old hag, adding with a half-sneering leer, "Perhaps you may be at church?"

"Come to-morrow, I say, at twelve o'clock precisely!" repeated Miss Neale, with angry petulance. "I live at that house yonder. If you come as the clock is striking, you will find the front door ajar. Enter—and I shall be waiting for you."

"I will be punctual to the instant," said Mrs. Chicklade: and as she turned to depart in another direction, she muttered to herself, "I thought so! When once they have known me, they cannot do without me. Things are looking up: the tide of fortune is changing—and at length I am in luck's way again."

Meanwhile Cicely Neale was continuing her way homeward—but with a slower pace and even a more deeply thoughtful look than before she had encountered Mrs. Chicklade. Mingled with the expression of her countenance was an air of annoyance, which presently found utterance from her lips, as she murmured, "What ill fortune could possibly have cast that vile wretch in my way? Ah! she is one of those creatures who, when once known, will continually cross one's path

—and to get rid of whom one might almost be driven to the perpetration of a crime!"

The following day was Sunday. Mr. and Mrs. Timperley always made it a rule to go to church with the utmost regularity; and they likewise insisted that as many of their domestics as could possibly be spared should attend divine service also. This much of the habits of the household had been already intimated to Miss Neale; and she had therefore fixed her appointment with Mrs. Chicklade for an occasion when it could be most conveniently kept—that is to say, with the least chance of attracting any particular notice. At breakfast-time on the Sunday morning, Cicely pleaded a very severe headache as an excuse for not accompanying her uncle and aunt to church; and they accordingly went without her. All the servants, with the exception of the cook and the housemaid, likewise proceeded to the temple of worship; and Cicely Neale with some degree of anxiety awaited the moment when Mrs. Chicklade was to make her appearance. A few minutes before twelve, Cicely assured herself that the cook was in the kitchen and that the housemaid was busy with her work in the bed-chambers up-stairs. She stole down from the drawing-room—set the front door ajar—and then lingered in the hall, until that door was pushed completely open just as the church-clocks were proclaiming the hour of mid-day. Cicely motioned Mrs. Chicklade to close the door cautiously; and she then led the way into Mr. Timperley's private office—that being the most convenient room in which they might converse together without the fear of the presence of any stranger in the house being suspected by either of the domestics who had remained away from church.

She should observe that it was very far from Mr. Timperley's habit to leave unlocked the door of his private office: but it happened on this present occasion that he had done so, the key being in the door. Immediately after breakfast he had descended to his office, where he had remained engaged for about half-an-hour—until his butler had requested him to look into the cellar, on account of some little accident which had befallen a bin of choice wine; and on ascending from the lower regions, Mr. Timperley found his wife waiting for him in the hall. She was rather impatient—it was close upon eleven o'clock; and he had therefore at once snatched down his hat from a peg and issued with his wife from the house. To this circumstance was to be attributed Mr. Timperley's oversight in leaving the key of his private room in the lock. Miss Neale had observed that it was there when descending to set the front-door ajar; and she at once perceived that it would be the best place for her interview with Mrs. Chicklade;—so that thither she accordingly conducted the old woman.

The writing-table was strewn with documents, which Mr. Timperley had been examining previous to his departure for church; for he did not hesitate to devote an hour or two to such professional study on a Sunday; and thus, as the reader has doubtless already conjectured, the lawyer's regular attendance at a place of worship was for mere external show.

Cicely Neale and Mrs. Chicklade were now in the private office together. There was an expres-

sion of calm resolve on the countenance of the former—the placid determination of one who had made up her mind to a particular course of action, unless anything should transpire to suggest a change of policy. Mrs. Chicklade was attired with the same gaudiness as on the preceding day; so that she looked like a mummy dressed up in flaunting apparel. She simpered and smiled to a certain extent, but merely for the purpose of conciliation—and not to enact the part of one who felt that her power over another was so slight as to require the accessory means of cajolery and sycophancy.

"Now tell me," said Miss Neale, adopting somewhat of an air of command, "what do you know of him?"

"He is in London, as doubtless you fancied," replied the old woman; "or else you yourself would scarcely be in the matropolis likewise."

"Yes—I conjectured that he must be in London," said Miss Neale. "Do you know anything of his pursuits—his occupations—his proceedings?"

"I have seen him on two or three occasions in the neighbourhood of St. John's Wood," rejoined Mrs. Chicklade. "That is a little way beyond the Regent's Park."

"I know it well," interrupted Cicely. "When a girl I lived in London; and I am well acquainted with its principal neighbourhoods. Besides, I have acquaintances at St. John's Wood. But proceed. I feel convinced that you can tell me more. You are not a woman to miss an opportunity of playing the part of a spy in respect to any one whom you may have ever known."

"I am going to tell you all I know," answered Mrs. Chicklade. "He in whom you are interested, visits two young ladies——"

"What kind of ladies?" asked Cicely, a slight flush flitting over her countenance.

"Respectable young ladies, and eminently beautiful," rejoined the old woman. "They live at a house called Sidney Villa——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Cicely, for a moment struck with astonishment. "You mean Miss Lister and Miss Evelyn?"

"I do," replied Mrs. Chicklade. "Do you know them?" she asked.

"They visit at this house," answered Cicely: "they are the same to whom I just now alluded. Miss Evelyn was here two or three days ago; and Miss Lister was here yesterday. It was my intention to call upon those young ladies—they are cousins—to-morrow: but after what you have told me"—and here Miss Neale stopped short, looking bewildered as well as afflicted, and even alarmed.

"Yes, it is true," continued Mrs. Chicklade, "that he visits at that house; and after what you have just said, your position evidently becomes all the more perplexing and difficult; so that you stand in all the greater need of an astute, clever, and discreet assistant like myself. I am a woman who——"

"And why think you," asked Miss Neale, who had not heeded Mrs. Chicklade's latter observations,—and why think you," she said, her voice having a certain hollowness in it, as if under the influence of powerful emotions agitating in her bosom, but which she was endeavouring with all

her power to control,—and what think you is his object in visiting at Sidney Villa? Those young ladies are of a respectability which forbid the thought that his aim can be a base one."

"Then perhaps he means marriage," said Mrs. Chicklade; and with a furtive look she watched the effect of the suggestion she had just thrown out.

Cicely Neale was already paler than usual: but now for a moment she became ghastly with the death-like pallor which overspread her countenance: her lips themselves—those lips which were naturally of so rich a redness—became white; and they quivered as she seemed to gasp for the power of utterance. At length she said in a low deep voice, but rather as if musing to herself than actually addressing the old woman, "And he dares to think of marriage—with another?"

"There can be little doubt of it!" said Mrs. Chicklade. "Indeed, I heard a whisper in the neighbourhood to this effect——"

"It is false, woman!" ejaculated Miss Neale, with a sudden fierceness of tone; and her eyes, which naturally were so soft in their expression, flashed forth fire, as if the pure deep blue of the summer-night's heaven became all in an instant vivid with a blaze of lightning. "You only tell me this because you think that you will render your services all the more necessary to me!"

Cicely had rightly fathomed Mrs. Chicklade's motive: but the old woman met her blazing looks with an audacious hardihood; and resolving to stick to the untruth, she said, "Yes, I have heard that report in the neighbourhood of St. John's Wood. If you disbelieve me, go and inquire for yourself."

Miss Neale again grew profoundly agitated—but rather with the warfare of inward feelings, than with those that were outwardly betrayed,—unless it were by a returning ghostliness of look and a momentary quivering of the ashy lips—those lips which seemed of so luscious a beauty when full of their rich redness, but which looked absolutely hideous when the vital colouring had thus fled from them.

"And has that same rumour said more?" she at length asked, in a hollow voice: "has it ascribed his attentions to either of those ladies in particular?"

Mrs. Chicklade was on the very point of boldly proclaiming one of the cousins at random, when it struck her that she might overshoot the mark, and that the more she enveloped the whole affair in mystery, uncertainty, and doubt, the more certain it was that her own services would be engaged by Miss Neale. She therefore said, "I have not as yet been able to glean so deep an insight into all that is progressing at Sidney Villa. But if you know those young ladies, you are aware that they are surpassingly beautiful."

"Yes—I have seen them," said Cicely, heaving a profound sigh; "and they are indeed the loveliest girls my eyes ever rested upon. Oh! I feel," she added, as she flung a despairing glance into a mirror over the mantelpiece, "that I myself am not to be compared to either of them!"

"Take courage, my dear—take courage," said Mrs. Chicklade, in a half soothing, half patronising tone: but she stopped short, and even quailed for an instant, at the look of intense loathing

and disgust which Cicely's fine eyes darted upon her.

"Cease, woman!" ejaculated the young lady. "If from my own heart I receive not the inspiration of courage, it is not to be gained from the lips of such as you!"

"Well, well, Miss—I did not mean to offend you," said Mrs. Chicklade. "I only thought that if I were entrusted with this business, I would very soon devise some scheme to upset all the young gentleman's hopes and ideas in that quarter."

"Now listen to me!" said Miss Neale, speaking in a firm tone of voice and wearing a decisive look. "I do not mean to avail myself of your services. The rose of love has already been poisoned by the slime of the snail passing over it. Tears—aye, the bitterest tears—have gone far to wash that slime away, as the crystal shower from heaven might wash it from the rose!—and it shall be no more polluted by such venomous contact! I sought this interview but to elicit from your lips whatsoever you might have to tell me. I would have questioned you yesterday—but we could not speak in a public place. You have come to my appointment—you have answered my queries—and I will reward you. We then separate; and henceforth we continue utter strangers to each other—as would to God we had always been!"

These last words were spoken with a sudden sinking of the voice, but yet with accents the fervour of which seemed all the more concentrated because the tone itself was thus lowered. Cicely felt in her pocket for her purse: but she had left it on the toilet-table of her bed-chamber.

"Remain here for a few moments," she said, "while I fetch you your recompense."

Miss Neale issued from the private office—first peeping cautiously forth to assure herself that the coast was clear. She ascended to her bed-chamber, and possessed herself of her purse: but on descending again, she perceived that the housemaid was sweeping down the lower flight of stairs. Cicely could not pass her, for the servant was in a position to behold her re-enter Mr. Timperley's private office. This misadventure was terribly annoying, and even alarming: but there was no immediate help for it—nothing but a little patience and a trusting in the chapter of accidents. Miss Neale was compelled to enter the drawing-room, the door of which she however left open in order that she might hear when the housemaid had finished her work upon the stairs. Cicely had adopted the precaution of taking the key from the lock of her uncle's door when first she conducted Mrs. Chicklade into the private office: but what if the housemaid should happen to try that door and find it unlocked? what if it were even a part of her duty to penetrate into the office in order to set it to rights? Cicely had only been a few days at the house; and she was not so entirely acquainted with its habits and customs as to be beyond the reach of those fears. She therefore remained a prey to the intensest alarm for nearly twenty minutes, during which the housemaid was dusting down the stairs and sweeping out the hall. Never did twenty minutes seem so much like twenty hours to the anxious and suspenseful Miss Neale!—never, in her whole life had it struck her that any maid-servant was so unnecessarily

long in the performance of her work! And then, too, it was now a quarter to one—church might soon be over—the Timperleys and their domestics might return at any moment!

But all these apprehensions with which Cicely was torturing herself, proved to be unfounded. The housemaid finished her work in the hall, and descended into the kitchen. Then Cicely glided down the stairs, and noiselessly re-entered the private office.

"Here," she said to Mrs. Chicklade, as she deposited twenty sovereigns upon the table, "is the recompense which I have to offer. You may judge by its amount that it is not a mere reward for the slight trouble I have this day given you in coming to meet me—but that it is a parting present from one who requires your services no longer, and who never again means to use them. Go your ways—and cross my path no more!"

Mrs. Chicklade gathered up the money without a word: but when she had secured it about her person, she said with a bold insolent air, "And so you intend, Miss Neale, to conduct your future proceedings without my assistance?"

"Such is my intention," answered Cicely, with calm resoluteness of manner.

"And what if I insist upon being engaged as your instrument and agent?" said the woman.

"I should reject your peremptory demand," replied Miss Neale, "with as much determination as I have ere now declined the proffer when it was more civilly made."

"Would you threaten me?" asked the old woman, her reptile eyes gleaming with a sinister light.

"You would care no more for my threats than I should care for yours, were you to utter them," responded Cicely, still with a calm and quiet resoluteness of tone and manner.

"And yet I could tell a tale," said the woman, with another malignant flashing of those hideous eyes of hers.

"Tell it!" said Cicely; "and see how much I shall care for it!"

Mrs. Chicklade now gazed upon the young lady with an astonishment as much unfeigned as in its betrayal it was involuntary; and then suddenly changing her whole demeanour—either because she fancied that Cicely must have some strong ground for thus defying her, or else because she herself did not deem it politic to quarrel with one who might after all need her services and who paid for them so liberally—she said, "Come, come, Miss! I was but jesting—don't be angry with me! If you won't let me assist in this matter, you must of course have your own way: but in case you should require my help, I may as well let you know where I may be found—"

"No!" said Miss Neale resolutely; "it is useless to maintain even the shadow of an idea that our intercourse is to be continued or renewed. I do not want to know your address. You have got your reward—and beware how you ever again come across my path. And now leave me!"

Mrs. Chicklade again flung an involuntary look of astonishment upon Miss Neale,—evidently marvelling how it was possible she could assume such high ground and speak so dictatorially: but she beheld in Cicely's countenance nothing to afford a clue to the reading of the mystery: those features

still wore an expression of calm resoluteness and fixed determination. The old woman therefore moved towards the door which Cicely opened for her; and the young lady having assured herself that the coast was still clear, afforded Mrs. Chicklade egress from the house. A glance, flung forth from the front door, convinced Miss Neale likewise that the Timperleys were not yet returning homeward through the square; and having replaced the key in the door of the private office, she stole back to the drawing-room, perfectly satisfied that Mrs. Chicklade's visit remained unsuspected by the two servants who were in the house.

When the Timperleys returned home from church, the lawyer discovered that he had left the key of his private office behind him. He hastily entered that room—but came forth again, tolerably well satisfied that no one had penetrated thither during his absence. Still he deemed it expedient to assure himself more completely of this fact; and summoning the housemaid, he said, as if in a sort of indifferent manner, "You didn't happen to go, Mary, into my private room while I was away at church—to dust it—or anything of that kind?"

"Oh, no, sir!" at once replied the young woman. "I am sure I did not know whether it was unlocked or not: for your orders are so positive that the inner office is never to be touched only at such times when you give permission——"

"Well, well, Mary—all right!" said Mr. Timperley. "Only I happened to leave my key behind—and there are so many valuable papers tossing about—that I feared——"

But the rest of Mr. Timperley's speech was lost in indistinct mutterings, as with the key in his pocket he ascended the stairs to the drawing-room.

"Cicely, my dear," inquired Mrs. Timperley, "how do you feel now?"

"My headach is a little better," replied Miss Neale: "but I have never once quitted this sofa—for on a sofa she was half-reclining—"all the while you have been at church."

Mr. Timperley was rejoiced to hear this assurance from his niece's lips; for it saved him putting the question whether she had by any accident had the curiosity to penetrate into his sanctum.

"But you still look pale and ill, my dear girl," said Mrs. Timperley: "and you must take care of yourself."

"Oh, I shall be better to-morrow, my dear aunt!" responded Miss Neale: and with a slight cough she concealed a sigh which she could not altogether repress.

CHAPTER X.

MR. TIMPERLEY.

PUNCTUALLY at ten o'clock on the following morning, Mr. Timperley entered his private room, and sat down to look over the letters which he had previously just glanced at while seated at the breakfast-table. He had not been many minutes in his professional sanctuary, before there was a tap at the door communicating with the outer

office: and the clerk who entered announced Lord Mendlesham.

The nobleman made his appearance: the clerk withdrew: and the lawyer rose to receive his patrician patron with a low bow. Lord Mendlesham was a man of about five-and-forty years of age—tall—upright—and somewhat stoutly built, yet not inclining to corpulency, nor with any clumsy inelegance of figure. He had dark grey eyes, which were exceedingly intelligent and expressive—an aquiline countenance—and all the evidences of having been in his youth exceedingly handsome. His hair, which was of a dark brown, had only just begun to be mingled with grey: but it was much worn away from off the temples and from the front part of the crown—which partial baldness however, by giving height to the forehead, added to the noble and intellectual expression of the countenance. His lordship was well, yet plainly dressed; and the dust upon his boots indicated that he had walked from his own abode at the West End to the lawyer's house in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Having taken the seat which the clerk had placed for him, Lord Mendlesham motioned to Mr. Timperley to resume his own chair: and he at once opened his business by saying, "I call to consult you on a very unpleasant affair."

"Indeed, my lord? I am sorry to hear it," said Mr. Timperley; though in his heart he was really glad—for the unpleasant affairs of his clients were lucrative ones to himself.

We should, however here observe that Mr. Timperley was not Lord Mendlesham's regular legal adviser, but was merely honoured with some small portion of the nobleman's affairs.

"Have you heard no rumour, Mr. Timperley?" inquired Lord Mendlesham: "has nothing met your ears—nothing of a peculiar nature?"

"Nothing, my lord," replied the attorney, "which, can, in any way afford me a clue to what is now passing in your lordship's thoughts."

"Then I can tell you, Mr. Timperley," rejoined Mendlesham, "that it is a most unpleasant business, and one which has given me the greatest annoyance ever since the rumour reached my ears on Saturday evening. Indeed, I should have come to you yesterday, only that I fancied you legal gentlemen are fond of going out of town on the Sunday——"

"No, my lord," interjected Mr. Timperley. "I always make it a rule to attend a place of worship on the Sabbath——"

"Well, well," interrupted Mendlesham, as a slight and scarcely perceptible expression of incredulous scorn for an instant curled his haughty upper lip: "in any case, then, I did well not to disturb you. And now at length I may consult you. That wild boy of mine has been fighting a duel!"

"What? the Hon. Mr. Hector perilling his precious life!" exclaimed the lawyer, affecting a deep sympathy. "I have not the pleasure of the Hon. Mr. Hector's acquaintance—indeed I only just know him by sight: but still for your lordship's sake I am deeply afflicted."

"I have not told you all," exclaimed Lord Mendlesham. "Who do you think was his antagonist? None other——" and here he fixed his eyes with a look of peculiar signifi-



cancy on the lawyer—"none other than Charles De Vere!"

"Good God! is it possible?" exclaimed Mr. Timperley, with a sudden start which was indeed most unaffected.

"It is as I tell you," resumed Lord Mendlesham, in a low mournful voice. "The rumour was wafted to my ear on Saturday night at the Carlton——" thus alluding to the aristocratic club to which he belonged, and which will show the reader that his lordship was a member of the high Tory party. "The moment I heard the report of this duel, I knew that it must be a true one: for Hector has been confined to the house for the last few days with some ailment of the arm, sustained, as he alleged, by a fall from his horse, and which he represented to be so slight as to render medical attendance unnecessary."

"And what did your lordship do on bearing this report?" inquired Timperley.

No. 7.—AGNES.

"I did not choose to speak to my son upon the subject," responded Lord Mendlesham. "I was fearful of betraying all that I felt. You can understand me well, Timperley?"

"I do, my lord!" responded the attorney. "But what is to be done? The affair has taken place—and I presume there it will end."

"Do you not comprehend," exclaimed Mendlesham, with bitterness in his accents as well as with impatience in his manner, "that the incident is for a thousand reasons most unpleasant? After a duel, those who were lately enemies are always more friendly disposed towards each other than ever!—that which was previously a mere acquaintance, ripens into friendship! Do you now understand me, Timperley?"

"I do, my lord," responded the solicitor. "It is indeed for countless reasons most inconvenient!—and if I already fathom your lordship's purpose, it is to devise something to prevent this friendship

from growing—this intimacy from springing up. First of all, does your lordship know the cause of the duel?"

"That is a point," replied Mendlesham, "on which I have been utterly unable to obtain any information, beyond the fact that there was some female in the case. For this reason also it is requisite that researches should be made, and perhaps measures taken."

"Precisely so, my lord," answered Timperley. "And your lordship has fortunately determined not to speak upon the subject to your son?"

"I cannot, Timperley—I will not do it!" exclaimed the nobleman. "It is for you to take the matter in hand. Lose no time over it—be secret, and be cautious——"

"Your lordship knows that you can trust me," said Mr. Timperley, bending in his turn a significant look upon the nobleman. "For how many long years have I faithfully kept the important secret——"

"True, true, Timperley!" said Mendlesham; "and I have a grateful sense of your conduct in the matter. But lose no time in fathoming this affair! You will know where first to address yourself—ascertain all you can—and then we may consult upon what is requisite to be done."

Having thus spoken, Lord Mendlesham took his leave of the attorney,—who, after the nobleman's departure, remained for some moments in reflection upon all that he had heard. He was just rising from his seat to issue forth and enter upon the business now entrusted to him, when a clerk entered and handed him a letter. Mr. Timperley glanced at the handwriting; and perceiving that it was in a scrawling vulgar style, as if coming from some indifferently educated person, he suspected it might be some appeal to his charity; for Mr. and Mrs. Timperley did a great deal in the ostentatious philanthropic way—and as their bounty was regarded in many quarters as the sincere emanation of a natural benevolence, they had numerous appeals, both verbal and written, from poor distressed persons. Mr. Timperley was therefore on the point of laying down the letter again, to be read at his leisure, when a second thought suggested that it might perhaps be just as well to open it. He did so—and first looked at the signature: it was the name of a woman, but unknown to him. He perused the letter, which was not very long; but its contents must have been exceedingly significant—for they produced the most powerful effect upon the lawyer. He became pale as death—the letter dropped from his hands—and he staggered back a pace or two as if seized by a sudden vertigo. Indeed it was some minutes before he could at all regain any portion of his wonted composure and self-possession; and then taking up the letter, he again perused it from beginning to end.

"Five thousand pounds!" he muttered to himself: "five thousand pounds, to be flung as it were into the street! It would be just the same if I were to count five thousand golden sovereigns into a bag, take the treasure with me, and toss it over the parapet of Waterloo Bridge! Five thousand pounds at one swoop!—it is scarcely to be thought of!"

Yet when Mr. Timperley again glanced at the ill-written letter which lay before him, his look

grew deeply dejected; and he muttered to himself, "Yet what help is there for it?"

He locked up the letter in his desk; and when he had taken out the key, he tried the drawer to convince himself that it was securely fastened and that no one could penetrate into its mysteries during his absence. He then issued forth from his office: but instead of walking through Lincoln's Inn Fields with the pride of conscious wealth and importance, as his demeanour was wont to be, he had a half-dejected, half-bewildered look, as if some very great change had suddenly taken place in his circumstances.

"The day after to-morrow, five thousand pounds!" he muttered to himself: and then he endeavoured to find consolation in the thought that he could certainly pay the amount without finding his purse very much the poorer for it afterwards: but there was no real solace in the reflection; for he loved money dearly—he cared not how hard he worked to obtain it—and he by no means liked the idea of parting from it without an equivalent.

Presently taking a cab, he rode up to St. John's Wood, and bade the driver make inquiries for a little villa-residence called Belmont Cottage. The habitation was soon found; and Mr. Timperley alighted at the door. His summons was answered by Margaret the housemaid, who did not however know him—for on replying in the affirmative to his query whether Mrs. De Vere were at home, she asked what name she should take in to her mistress?

"It is of little consequence," replied Mr. Timperley. "Say a legal gentleman wishes to speak to Mrs. De Vere."

Mrs. De Vere herself now appeared upon the threshold of the parlour-door; for she had seen Mr. Timperley alight; and she affably requested him to walk in. He at once accepted the invitation; and when he was alone with Mrs. De Vere, he said somewhat abruptly, "I suppose your son is not in the way at this hour?"—for it was now about noon.

"No—he is at his office—or at least I hope so," answered Mrs. De Vere, heaving a profound sigh as she thought of the recent duel, concerning which she had little doubt in her mind that Mr. Timperley had come.

"Ah! and it would be as well if he were always at the office!" said the lawyer, whose manner was not a whit more polite than it need be: on the contrary, it appeared as if Mr. Timperley were more or less avenging on Mrs. De Vere the bitter annoyance and vexation occasioned him by the ill-written letter. "What does the young fellow mean by going and getting himself into such scrapes—picking a quarrel with the very last person in the world that he ought to quarrel with!"

"I know it—I know it!" exclaimed the unhappy mother, hursting into tears. "Oh, Mr. Timperley! if you only knew what anguish I have suffered on account of this deplorable affair, you would not speak so harshly to me! But how has it possibly become whispered abroad——"

"I don't know," rejoined Mr. Timperley. "It was mentioned to his lordship at his club: he has however said nothing to his son Hector upon the subject. And now, madam, perhaps you will

have the kindness to tell me all you know about it?"

"I know nothing more than that Mr. Hardress bestowed some insult upon a young lady in the presence of Charles:—Charles considered himself bound to resent it—and hence the duel."

"But the young lady—who was she?" demanded Mr. Timperley.

"My son did not mention the name," replied Mrs. De Vere; "and indeed, from the way in which he told me the tale, I should conceive that the lady herself was a stranger to him."

"And was he previously acquainted with Hector Hardress?" inquired Mr. Timperley.

"He was," responded Mrs. De Vere, with a deeply mournful look. "They met some three months back—at the house of mutual acquaintances who reside in this neighbourhood."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Timperley. "And who might these be?"

"Two highly respectable young ladies," rejoined Mrs. De Vere, "who live at that picturesque villa which you see yonder."

"Why, I know them well!" exclaimed Mr. Timperley. "I have known them ever since they were born!"

"True!" murmured Mrs. De Vere to herself. "It must be so!"

"What are you saying, ma'am?" asked Mr. Timperley, not catching the sense of the words.

"I was merely thinking that this is a most unfortunate complication," responded Mrs. De Vere evasively.

"Unfortunate indeed!" ejaculated the lawyer. "It is strange that neither Miss Evelyn nor Miss Lister should ever have happened to mention in my hearing that they were acquainted with either Hector Hardress or your son. But Ah! I recollect! I have scarcely seen the young ladies for the last three months—Mrs. Timperley has been unwell, and given no parties. Do you think it possible, ma'am, that the quarrel could have been about either Miss Lister or Miss Evelyn?"

"I really do not know," answered Mrs. De Vere: and she was indeed this time telling the exact truth.

"Then you must find out every particular from your son," resumed the lawyer, speaking with an air of authority. "His lordship came to me ere now, considerably agitated——"

"Oh, I would rather that anything should have happened than this!" exclaimed Mrs. De Vere. "But it is not my fault! I entreat you to believe that I am in no way to blame—my conduct has been most cautious and circumspect——"

"Well, well," said Mr. Timperley, "we must see how to make the best of the matter. I do not blame you—neither does his lordship: it is a coincidence—and an unfortunate one. We are all circumspect; and it is hard to find our paths crossed as it were by these untoward incidents. I did not give your maid-servant my name; and therefore your son need not know that such a person as Mr. Timperley has called. It is fortunate that I was thus guarded; for he may have heard my name mentioned at Sidney Villa—and it is just as well that the young ladies there should not know that I have any other acquaintance in this neighbourhood."

A slight flush appeared upon Mrs. De Vere's

countenance, as she gently said, "I myself have sedulously abstained from any chance or risk of forming the acquaintance of those young ladies."

"Well," continued Mr. Timperley, "you must get every particular out of your son when he returns home this evening. Ascertain who the lady was—find out on what terms he is with Hector Hardress: in short, for your own sake——" and now he looked Mrs. De Vere in the face with a peculiar significance—"as well as for that of others, you must glean every requisite detail. I shall call upon you again to-morrow, at about the same hour—or perhaps a little later," added Mr. Timperley, as he bethought himself of other appointments for the earlier part of the next day.

He was now about to take his departure—when, as an idea struck him, he stopped short, exclaiming, "By the bye, the Michaelmas quarter has just passed; and you have not as yet called as usual. Therefore I may as well settle that little matter while I am here."

Thus speaking, he produced his pocket-book, and counted down bank-notes to the amount of fifty pounds: while Mrs. De Vere, with another slight flush upon her usually pale countenance, penned a receipt. The lawyer consigned it to his pocket-book, and issued from the cottage. As he re-entered the cab, he thought for a moment of calling at Sidney Villa, in order to ascertain if possible during the course of conversation with the cousins, whether either of them was indeed connected with the recent duel: but another moment's reflection decided him to leave the gleaning of all particulars to Mrs. De Vere herself: for he fancied that Miss Lister or Miss Evelyn might possibly have seen the cab proceed to Belmont Cottage and stop there, and he did not wish that they should know he had any acquaintance with Mrs. De Vere, lest they should question him on the point.

Mr. Timperley accordingly directed the cabman to retrace his way through Camden Town: but instead of proceeding to his office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, he desired that he might be taken to the debtor's prison in Whitecross Street. Arriving there, Mr. Timperley alighted; and he was evidently well known to the officials—for the moment his countenance appeared at the various iron gratings, the barred gates were opened—and he passed into one of the compartments of that spacious establishment. He bestowed half-patronising, half-familiar nods upon the several turnkeys who thus displayed so much alacrity to give him admittance: for the wealthy lawyer—who practised only in heavy cases, chancery suits, *et cetera*—was regarded in a very different light from the needy, seedy, boozing attorneys that infested the precincts of debtor's gaols at one time and those of the Insolvents' Court at another.

Mr. Timperley plunged into the Middlesex department—the special place of detention for prisoners who were arrested by the officers of the Sheriffs for the county, in contradistinction to those who were captured in the bailiwick of the City Sheriffs. In the large, low, ill-lighted room, crowded with prisoners and filled with tobacco-smoke, it would have been a difficult thing for an uninitiated visitor to pitch in a moment upon the particular individual whom he might have come to see. But Mr. Timperley knew at which of the many tables to find the

object of his own visit thither; and through the haze of tobacco-smoke he discovered the person whom he sought. This was an old man of at least seventy—very respectably attired—and enjoying the luxury of clean linen, which was an advantage possessed by few of his fellow-prisoners, as a glance flung around upon the motley assemblage would speedily have shown. The aged individual to whom we are alluding, at once started up from his seat on beholding Mr. Timperley; and an expression of anxious, almost feverish suspense seized upon his thin, pale, wan countenance. He was tall, and stooped considerably; his frame was emaciated; and yet it had a certain wiry vigour about it, considering his great age. Mr. Timperley beckoned him forth from the room; and they passed out into the paved court-yard to which the prisoners had access for purposes of exercise, and which was shut off by high walls from the other compartments of the establishment. There the lawyer and his client began pacing slowly to and fro together.

"What tidings, Mr. Timperley—what tidings have you brought me?" asked the old prisoner in accents of feverish suspense that corresponded with his looks. "Is there a possibility of any arrangement according to my terms?"

"None—on those terms," replied Mr. Timperley: "the case must come on again before the Lord Chancellor next Term; and as my clerks are drawing out the fresh affidavits, I have called on you for a few little particulars which are requisite."

They then conversed together upon the business to which the lawyer alluded; and from this discourse a listener—had one been by—might have gleaned that the old prisoner was plaintiff in the great Chancery suit of "*Barrington versus Dalham*"—that the case had already lasted about thirty years—that Mr. Waldron was originally employed for the plaintiff—that Mr. Timperley had succeeded him in that professional capacity—and that the matter was to be again argued very shortly before the Lord Chancellor—the said arguing being for about the hundredth time since the suit first commenced. Our supposed listener would moreover have gleaned that Mr. Barrington had once ridden in his carriage—had possessed a town-house and a country-mansion—equipages, horses, and hounds—but that all these evidences of wealth had long ago been so utterly swept away that they only existed like a dream of the past in the old man's mind. For five-and-twenty years he had been a prisoner in Whitecross-street—ever hoping that the "next Term" would see his case settled and himself a rich man once again—but ever destined to find that he must wait patiently till the "next Term;" so that Term after Term had gone by, years had faded past, and there he was a prisoner still—but still looking forward with the feverish anxiety of hope to the speedy settlement of his much involved affairs.

"But have you hinted, my dear sir," he inquired, as he and Timperley walked to and fro in the prison-yard together,—"have you hinted to the opposing attorneys that I would agree to a compromise—that if Dalham would surrender me up the estate in Norfolk, the three farms in Kent, the houses in the City, and the ready money in the Accountant-General's hands—"

"Have you reflected, Mr. Barrington," asked Timperley, with an ill-concealed sneer, "that you are demanding just three-fourths of the whole object of litigation? Sir John Dalham's attorneys ridicule the proposition—"

"And I will not bate another farthing of my claim!" ejaculated the old man, querulous and trembling with excitement. "I know that it is good! Waldron knew it—and you know it, Mr. Timperley!"

"If I had not thought so," responded the attorney, "I should not have taken it up at a venture at poor Mr. Waldron's death, nor should I have gone on laying out my good money in prosecuting the matter. But just reflect, Mr. Barrington. You have been here many years—you have seen your family, once numerous, dying off one by one—"

"My God, it is true!" ejaculated the old man, with a sudden burst of anguish; "and there are only Gustavus and Winifred left!"

"And for those grandchildren you must have a deep affection, Mr. Barrington?" said Timperley, as if catching at a chord which he fancied might most deeply vibrate to the heart's core of his aged client.

"Yes, yes—I love them well!" exclaimed Barrington. "It cut me to the quick when poor Gus insisted upon going to sea—and there is Winnie who toils with her needle to support herself and her poor old grandfather—"

"Well, then, Mr. Barrington," interjected Timperley, "for these considerations—for the sake of your grandchildren—you ought to be a little more reasonable in your views. Remember, law is a ticklish thing to deal with; and though your claim is founded upon the strictest right, yet I think that I should not be doing my duty as your legal adviser if I were not to suggest that one-third for instance—"

"Never, Mr. Timperley!" cried the old man, stopping short and looking the attorney fixedly in the face. "I will remain and rot in gaol sooner! You know as well as I how I have been robbed and plundered by Sir John Dalham—how kept out of my just rights: and I have sworn that whenever I issue forth from these walls, it shall be in the enjoyment of at least three-fourths of my just due, if not of the whole. So far as compromise goes, I have recently made concessions, for poor Winnie's sake, which but a few years ago I never would have thought of! Ask me to yield no further: I will not do it! Besides, this next Term"—and here the aged prisoner returned to harp upon his old string—"the next Term must see the settlement of the business."

"Well, I hope so," said the lawyer, the least thing dubiously.

"Now look you, Mr. Timperley," exclaimed the old man, eyeing his solicitor with keenness: "if you have any disinclination to prosecute my business, tell me so at once—tell me so frankly—and I will find another attorney to take it up. You long ago withdrew the allowance you were wont to make: but I did not grumble at that—I thought it was sufficient for you to advance the fees and incur all the expenses requisite for carrying on the case. But now if you hesitate—"

"I do not hesitate, Mr. Barrington," interrupted Timperley, looking for a moment frightened at the

independence of his aged client's suddenly displayed spirit. "I will go on with the case: but I only thought I was doing the duty of a legal adviser—and—as a Christian," added Timperley, "to proffer a suggestion."

"Let me never again hear such a suggestion from your lips!" ejaculated Barrington. "No no! I will not yield to the oppressor! I must become rich—very, very rich once again—for the sake of Gus, who has gone as a sailor—and of poor Winnie, who toils so laboriously with her needle——"

"Well, well, Mr. Barrington," interrupted the lawyer, wreathing his countenance into an expression of friendship and sympathy, "you shall have your own way; and I will do the best I can for you. Let me see? I have taken down in my pocket-book the little memoranda I required: the affidavits and briefs shall be prepared—and they shall be sent in a few days for your inspection."

"Ah, here is Winnie!" exclaimed Mr. Barrington: and his countenance brightened up with an almost childish delight as he beheld his granddaughter advancing towards him.

Mr. Timperley now took a hurried leave of his aged client,—bowing with sufficient politeness to Winifred as he passed; for he had on two or three former occasions seen the young girl with her grandsire: but he had never exchanged half-a-dozen words with her. Indeed he studiously avoided her, though without seeming to do so: for he was always afraid lest she should appeal against the withdrawal of that one poor guinea a week which he was wont until within the last two or three years to allow Mr. Barrington.

Winifred hastened towards her old grandsire, and kissed him upon both cheeks with a degree of affection that had something fervid and vehement in it; as if she considered him to be so completely dependent upon herself for the very bread which he ate—so helpless in respect to all his own resources—that she was prepared to make any sacrifice on his behalf, and do anything for that poor old man whose prisonage was now of a quarter of a century's duration.

She was about eighteen years of age—somewhat short of stature, but very well formed; and there was a certain gentility and gracefulness in her appearance which if she had been seen elsewhere and suitably appraised, would have left no doubt in the mind of the observer that she was a young lady by present social position, as she indeed was by birth. She had light hair and blue eyes: her complexion was clear—but her cheeks were pale, until they flushed with the agitation of her feelings on bounding forward to embrace her grandfather. She evidently possessed a good constitution and naturally vigorous health: for whatsoever labour she might accomplish, or whatsoever cares she might have, had not attenuated the form, which was naturally plump, full, and well rounded. Nor did her cheeks display the slightest haggardness: their pallor, and a certain pensiveness of the general expression, were the only indications that Winifred Barrington toiled hard or was unhappy. As for her apparel, it was exceedingly neat—but of the plainest and simplest materials. Yet the straw bonnet was so tastefully trimmed with its cheap ribbon—the cotton dress was so well made and so scrupulously clean—the somewhat scanty shawl was worn with so much unstudied

grace—the hose which displayed the well-rounded ankles were of such snowy whiteness—and the half-faded kid gloves defined such symmetrically shaped hands, that Winifred's toilet altogether would have produced the impression at a first glance that it was cozier and better than it really was.

Winifred Barrington had known the prison from her infancy: her earliest recollections were associated with it. She could carry back her memory to the period when, as a little child, she used to sit upon the table at which her grandfather seated himself in the great, long, low-pitched ward, rendered hazy with tobacco-smoke. She recollected full well how her father used to sit for hours together, looking over papers with her grandsire; and she bore in mind how at about eight years old she was put in mourning for that father's death. Then she remembered how her visits to the prison used to be fewer and farther between, because she went as a weekly boarder to school—whence her mother fetched her away every Saturday evening that she might go and dine with her grandsire on the Sunday—on which occasions he always had a few pence to give her to take back to school on the Monday. Then the next important date in her memory—marking the age of fifteen—was her mother's death,—an incident for which she again went into mourning: but she recollected that the money for this mourning, as well as for the funeral itself, was with difficulty raised by her old grandsire:—during the lapse of years he had been getting poorer since the first gleam of Winnie's prison experiences. After her maternal parent's death she had lived with a widowed aunt, the mother of Gustavus who has been already referred to, and who was consequently Winifred's cousin. Then that aunt died, when Winnie was about sixteen; and it was soon afterwards that her cousin Gus went out to sea,—some last compassionate friend of the ruined family having procured for him a berth on board a merchant ship. It was a hard thing for the cousins to part: but they knew they could not live together; and Gustavus, possessing an independent spirit, was resolved to earn the bread of his own industry. Winifred was now altogether alone in the world: for what protection to her was her helpless old grandsire in prison? He was penniless; and she had to earn money, not merely to support herself, but to maintain him likewise.

And now the reader comprehends how it was that Mr. Barrington had a decent suit of clothes upon his back, as well as linen that was scrupulously clean. And every day he had his meals, which if not sumptuous, were at all events regular, wholesome, and sufficient. He enjoyed his two diurnal pints of porter: he had his tobacco and snuff; and of a Sunday, when the repast was slightly more luxurious than on other days, he was enabled to cheer himself with an additional allowance of strong beer, or else with a little spirits which Winifred smuggled in for him. This last indulgence was contrary to the prison regulations; and from the earliest date to which her recollections went back, she remembered the painted inscription at the entrance of the ward, denouncing pain and penalties against any one who might introduce spirituous liquors. But Winnie would cheerfully risk the House of Correction rather than

timidly forbear from furnishing something to cheer her old grandaere when in his dejected moods: all the turnkeys knew that now and then there was a little bottle at the bottom of Winnie's basket; but not for worlds would they have thought of searching it. They had known her from her infancy; and though their occupation was one but too well calculated to render their hearts somewhat flinty, they could not help being touched by the girl's devotedness to the long-incarcerated captive.

Old age is naturally—and we had almost said necessarily selfish. This is probably a well-meant dispensation of heaven; for it would be too much for old age to have the cares of others to attend to as well as its own. Thus, with all his affection for his granddaughter, Mr. Barrington did not think quite so much as he ought to have done whether she were not depriving herself of many necessities in order to furnish him with comforts: he did not even reflect that she must work most marvellously hard with the needle, and ply it most profitably likewise, to maintain him with all he wanted. Things appeared to go on well enough in this respect: she never complained—on the contrary, she always assured him that she liked work and could obtain plenty of it, as well as a fair remuneration; so that he who knew nothing about such things was contented and satisfied. It is true that he sometimes read in a weekly liberal newspaper how milliners and slop-workers toiled from morning to night for a few pence; and then he would thank heaven "that his dear little Winnie belonged to a superior order of seamstresses and knew no such miseries as those!"

Winifred always begged her grandsire to maintain the utmost secrecy with reference to his resources—and to drop a hint that his lawyer continued to make him an allowance; and this recommendation was backed by the little remnant of pride which had survived all his misfortunes. The gaol-officials and the prisoners generally believed, therefore, that Mr. Barrington still received the guinea a week, with an occasional five-pound note, from Mr. Timperley: yet even with that impression, and in the absence of the knowledge that Winifred absolutely furnished everything, there was still sufficient in her devotedness to her grandsire to melt the most hardened hearts and subdue the most libertine. Indeed it appeared to be a sort of general understanding that old Barrington's granddaughter was to be treated with the utmost respect, and that nowhere in the prison an insulting look was to be thrown upon her nor an improper word breathed in her ears. We may add that her own demeanour fended in the first instance to command, and subsequently to ensure the continuance of this air of respect towards herself: her looks were modest and retiring: she seemed as if she had never breathed the contaminating atmosphere of a gaol; and when seated with her grandfather in the common ward, where a hundred captives besides himself were congregated—some the very refuse of society—she looked like a lily that had sprung up in a brake amidst rank and noxious weeds, without being choked, injured, or impaired by their vicinity.

"Did Mr. Timperley bring any good news?" inquired Winifred, when she had embraced the old man with that vehement ardour of affection to which we have already alluded.

"My case will come on again next Term—that is in another month," responded Barrington. "I am sure it will be settled then, Winnie—and we shall be rich—Oh, so rich, you cannot conceive! When I get the decision in my favour, you shall go and hire a beautiful house—No, I forgot! we shall have plenty of houses of our own: but you shall go and buy me a carriage—for I have sworn I will never leave these walls unless in my carriage. And you shall have such beautiful clothes and such fine jewellery!—and won't poor Gus be pleased when you write and tell him that he is to come home as quick as he can to be rich for the rest of his life? And then you shall never do another stitch of work, unless it is some delicate embroidery, or something of that sort. And we shall have plenty of servants, and a good cellar, Winnie; and then there will be no need to smuggle a little brandy for your old grandfather at the bottom of your basket. Oh, we shall be so happy!—and we shall quite forget that we ever saw the inside of this odious place!"

Winifred forced herself to look much happier than she really felt: for at the approach of every Term, ever since she could remember, she had heard her grandfather speak in the same strain; and the vision had yet to be realized. Hope itself had grown sick within her; and though she understood but very little indeed of her grandsire's affairs, yet she could not help fancying that if he had really justice on his side, the law could scarcely be so unjust as to keep him thus long without his rights. But she saw that it cheered and gladdened him to indulge in those bright prospects; and even if they were all a delusion, she would rather that the poor old wanderer over life's vast desert should revel in the visions of oases, splendid cities, and elysian spots, which the mirage conjured up, than that he should behold nought but one continuous dreariness of waste before him.

"Timperley must have thought me mad," continued Barrington, "to suppose for an instant that I would agree to surrender two-thirds of all my claim as a means of effecting a compromise. No, no! I will not do it! I should still leave those Dalhams rich; and it is requisite to appease my vindictive feelings, as well as to satisfy my own sense of retributive justice, that I should impoverish them. Cursed—hated Dalhams! Winnie, my darling, you must abhor and loathe the very name!"

The girl gazed for a few moments with an expression of consternation and affright upon her grandfather's countenance: and her lips even wavered as if a hushed shriek were passing behind them. But with a powerful effort she curbed, conquered, if not absolutely crushed her emotions; and she said gently, "Grandfather, those are strong terms for one Christian to use in respect to another."

She saw that the old man was about to burst forth again in a passionate tirade against his opponents; and in order to turn the conversation, she suddenly assumed a joyous look, as she said, "Oh, grandfather! you know not for what nice young ladies I am working at this moment. They live up at St. John's Wood. You remember Mr. Williams, that baker who was here some time and

who went through the Insolvents' Court? Well, he is established again in Camden Town: he supplies Sidney Villa with bread—he spoke to one of the servants—a nice woman, named Rachel—on my behalf: Rachel spoke to her young mistresses—and they have given me work. Or I should rather say that one of them has—Miss Evelyn: for her cousin, Miss Lister, does not appear to trouble herself much about such matters."

"Well, my dear Winnie," said the old man, "I am glad to hear that things are going on so well. I am sure you will not have to work much longer; for all the new affidavits and briefs will be ready in a few days—the case will come on next Term—and I shouldn't at all wonder if we eat our Christmas dinner outside these walls. Then I tell you what we will do, Winnie," continued the old man, his usually warm countenance lighting up with joy at the idea. "We will regale all the prisoners with roast beef, plum-pudding, and strong beer at our own expense; and we will make every heart happy throughout this place, where I am certain we shall not be at the time. No! for my business must be finished next Term."

Winifred tutored her own countenance to look radiant with hope likewise: but in comparison with the real feeling that was in her heart, it was as the effulgence of a brilliant chandelier in a nobleman's mansion to the feeble sickly glimmering of the solitary candle in the working-man's garret.

The young girl having assured herself that her grandsire possessed every requisite for the day, took her leave of him,—embracing the old man with all the vehemence of affection as before: but as she passed from the prison into the street, a shade came over her countenance—and she murmured to herself, "Oh, how I am deceiving him! Good heavens, how he is deceived!"

CHAPTER XL

THE DREAM.

The incidents which we are now about to relate, occurred on the day following that one of which we have been speaking in the previous chapter.

We again introduce the reader to Sidney Villa. Agnes rose at a somewhat early hour, as usual,—leaving her cousin fast asleep in the couch which they jointly occupied. The beautiful Miss Evelyn was more than ordinarily cautious in not disturbing Floribel; for she had reason to believe that her cousin had passed a restless night, and she therefore considerably left her to the enjoyment of the profound repose in which she was evidently now steeped.

Agnes walked forth into the garden, until Rachel came to announce that breakfast was served: then the charming maiden stole to the bed-chamber to take a peep at Floribel: but the latter was still slumbering; and Agnes still forbore from disturbing her. It was not until past ten o'clock that Miss Lister awoke; and then she would partake of nothing but a cup of tea; for she said that she felt indisposed—and she looked

the side of the bed, and looking anxiously upon Floribel's countenance, "I am afraid you passed a disturbed night—indeed I know that you did——"

"Ah, I recollect!" interrupted Floribel, a dead pallor seizing upon her cheeks. "I awoke with a sudden start—I alarmed you—you asked what was the matter with me—but I forgot the reply that I gave."

"You did not answer me for some minutes," responded Agnes; "and I saw by the rushlight which was burning in the room, that you seemed terror-stricken: in fact, my dear Floribel, your lips were white—but as I felt convinced that you were labouring under the influence of some dreadful dream, I did not choose to question you any more on the subject."

"Yes, I remember," said Floribel: "I told you after a little while that it was a frightful dream!"

Miss Lister now reflected deeply for upwards of a minute; and Agnes, watching her countenance with a look of anxiety and concern, saw that her cousin was still suffering under the influence of that very painful vision.

"I cannot understand how such a dream could possibly have haunted me," said Floribel, at length breaking silence and speaking in a low thoughtful tone. "It must have been on account of that romance which I was reading just before we went to bed: and yet there was nothing in its pages to find so horrible a reflection in my brain during the slumbers of the night. No—it must have had another source," she added, mournfully.

"Tell me this dream of your's, my sweet cousin," said Agnes. "Not that I ever attach any degree of importance to dreams——"

"Oh, no! I should hope not!" exclaimed Floribel eagerly, though she seemed as if she were otherwise impressed inwardly. "But explain to me, dear cousin, what you think is the cause of them. You have read more learned books than ever I have troubled myself with; and you are generally able to give a reason for things of this kind."

Agnes saw that her cousin had some very serious and particular motive for soliciting information on such a subject; and she meditated for a few instants upon the nature of the answer which she should give.

"I will try and explain," she said, "what my notion is of dreams. The mind, you know, Floribel, never sleeps: the memory is ever awake. But this mind is not always in the same state. Sometimes—indeed generally—when we are awake, it is under the guiding power of reason; and then we can think of what we choose and shape our thoughts according to our will. But when we are asleep, that power of volition sleeps also: the reasoning faculty, so to speak, is in abeyance. But as the mind sleeps not, and must ever go on thinking—for thought is identical with its own vitality—it runs riot and revels in all kinds of vague, confused, inconsistent, or eccentric ideas. Thus, when we are awake, and the reasoning power holds its sceptre, our trains of thought are rational: and we do not heap together a mass of incongruous ideas. But when we are asleep, and reason has for the time-being abdicated its throne, the mind cannot discipline its reflections, but

"My dear cousin," said Agnes, sitting down by

groups together all sorts of images and impressions, without sequence—without method."

"Then, according to your theory, Agnes," said Floribel, "the mind must be always thinking. And yet we do not dream all night long."

"There you are wrong, my dear cousin," replied Miss Evelyn: "we do dream all night long; but when we awake in the morning we only recollect those dreams which were most vivid and impressive at the time. Have you never felt, when slowly awakening, that the last of a train of thoughts seemed to be just gliding out of your mind?—and then you could not remember what they were. This was the end of a dream. But I have something more to say upon the subject. The mind is stored with millions of images and impressions, received from books, conversation, personal experiences, and all external circumstances. As a matter of course this immense crowd of images and impressions is infinitely varied—comprising the beautiful and the horrible, the pleasing and the painful, the enrapturing and the shocking. When we sleep, the mind—for want of the active wholesome impulse which our own volition and reasoning power give to it when we are awake—plunges as it were into that vortex of varied images and conflicting impressions, and conjures them up at random. Nevertheless, they sometimes appear to weave themselves together in a sort of natural sequence; so that the dreamer fancies himself to be hurried through a train of successive adventures. And observe! when we sleep the mind is always more likely to reproduce the latest or the most prominent impressions made upon it during the day; so that we seem to reenact in our slumber that which we performed when we were awake; but the circumstances so remembered are usually exaggerated, either in their beauty or their horror, their pleasure or their painfulness, by the fantastic aberrations of the mind when the reasoning power is dormant. You can in a moment understand how erratic and wayward is the mind when the volition slumbers or the reasoning power dozes; for even if when wide awake we abandon ourselves to reverie, we soon find ourselves falling into a train of fantastic ideas, for the very silliness of which we blush the moment we start up from that reverie again."

Floribel listened with a deep attention to these explanations which Agnes gave so lucidly, and yet with a certain modest bashfulness as if she were afraid of incurring the suspicion that she sought to make a display of her superior intelligence. When she had ceased speaking, Miss Lister reflected deeply for upwards of a minute; and then she said, with a sudden brightening-up of the countenance, "Well, if it be so, and if dreams are only fantastic incongruities—you must further prove the excellence of this theory of your's when you have heard the vision which so much disturbed me last night."

Agnes prepared to listen with attention; and Floribel commenced her explanations in the following manner:—

"I dreamt that it was in the middle of the day, and that I had just returned home from making some purchases at the West End. I fancied that amongst other things I had bought a new bonnet, which I wore on my return to the villa. Methought that on entering our toilet-chamber, I

found you in one of those simple light dresses which you are so fond of wearing; and you immediately began to express your regret that I should have purchased a bonnet which you declared to be much too gay and flaunting for a young unmarried lady of my age. We had some little argument on the subject; and I remember that I was so angry I at length tossed down the splendid bonnet on the carpet. Then I fancied that Rachel entered to say that some unknown friend had sent us each a present; and we desired that those presents might be brought into the room. There was at this point some little confusion in my dream; for I cannot precisely recollect how the objects were conveyed into the apartment: but the next phase of my vision is most vividly depicted in my memory."

Here Floribel shuddered perceptibly; and it was with more curiosity than Agnes was wont ordinarily to experience, that she awaited the continuation of the narrative.

"I next fancied," proceeded Floribel, "that you were standing at the toilet-table, preparing to open a beautiful box, elaborately carved, and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. It seemed to be of ebony, and was about the size of a work-box. At the same time I was preparing to open a very large box which had been deposited on the floor. I thought it was of a singular shape: it was as long as a coffin, but yet not of a coffin's form: it seemed to be a very lengthy trunk, but remarkably narrow. I was full of wonder as to what it could possibly contain: but I conjectured that it might be some exquisitely modelled statue. I opened it;—and, O Agnes! a hideous death's head grinned up at me from the interior of that box. It was a skeleton from around the bleached bones of which I had drawn away the winding sheet! At the same instant you were taking forth from the ebony box a simple chaplet or wreath of flowers; and it was then that I awoke with a start—and I think with a cry—from the strange and frightful dream."

The countenance of Agnes, which had for a few moments expressed horror at a portion of the recital, now became deeply serious. She reflected profoundly; and Floribel watched her with attention. There was a long interval of silence: and it was at last broken by Miss Lister, who said, "Is there anything in this dream, Agnes, to change your opinion in respect to the theory which you just now advanced?"

Agnes started on being thus addressed; and for a moment she flung a strange look upon Floribel,—a look in which compassion, astonishment, pain, and dismay were singularly blended.

"I can almost conjecture what is passing in your mind," said Miss Lister. "You see that the dream has produced a certain effect upon me; and I will candidly admit that for a while it wore—perhaps still wears a significant importance. That is why I asked you your opinion of dreams; for I knew that you were better skilled in such subjects than I myself could possibly be. Yet I am not altogether without common sense. I may be thoughtless at times—it is my nature perhaps; and still that dream had for me a typical or allegorical significance."

"Do not think so, my sweet cousin!" exclaimed Agnes, pained on Floribel's account for the turn



which the conversation was now taking. "Your dream only tended to corroborate my theory to the effect that visions are the fantastic grouping of certain images and impressions when the mind is no longer under the control of the reasoning power."

"And yet you yourself have shown," said Floribel, "that those images and impressions themselves must in the first instance have had reference to real facts and veritable circumstances. In a word, my dear Agnes, was I not led through the medium of a dream to appreciate the difference betwixt our characters and dispositions? I had purchased the fine bonnet for which you remonstrated: a gift of a simple chaplet of flowers was sent to yourself—while to me was forwarded the hideous proof that all earthly splendour and pomp, beauty and pride, must end in a ghastly skeleton at last!"

No. 8.—AGNES.

Though Agnes would have avoided, if possible, this climax to the previous subject, yet she was now seized with a sentiment of joy that her cousin should have thus interpreted her dream; and throwing her arms round Floribel's neck, she exclaimed, "Oh! without entering into the theory of dreams, believe that this one has been sent to you for a good purpose! Yes, my sweet cousin!—all of which we are proud in this world—as well as all that may flatter our pride—becomes vanity at last!"

Miss Evelyn was indeed as much surprised as rejoiced to find that her cousin had taken the vision so seriously, and that she had so willingly, as it appeared, accepted the illustration which forced itself upon her. But still, in another sense, Agnes was pained: her natural generosity and modesty were hurt by the idea of receiving the meed of compliment to the prejudice as it were of

the cousin whom she loved: for the simple wreath of flowers was in strong contrast with the ghastly grinning skeleton?

Floribel now seemed desirous to abandon the topic: she had felt the necessity of relieving her mind of the species of weight which the dream had left upon it: but when this task was accomplished, she was equally anxious to turn away from a disagreeable subject. Agnes was also ready to direct the discourse into a more cheerful channel; and she remained for an hour by the bedside, until Floribel signified her intention to rise and dress herself.

Agnes returned into the garden to give way to her reflections. The dream appeared to her most extraordinary; for according to her own theory, there must have previously been the lurking conviction in Floribel's mind that she was too much addicted to the vanities and frivolities of life: or how could the impression have been conjured up in her brain when she slept? and how could it have embodied itself in the form of a fantastic allegory? That Floribel comprehended and appreciated the true character and disposition of Agnes, was likewise apparent; or else this idea could not have also found its typical representation amidst the phases of the vision. Thus, for some personal reasons, Agnes was pained by the incident; but for other considerations she was rejoiced, inasmuch as she sincerely hoped the dream would produce a lasting beneficial effect on the mind of Floribel.

At about one o'clock in the afternoon of that day, Winifred Barrington called at Sidney Villa to deliver some work which she had finished, and to receive some other materials to make up. Floribel was now lying indolently upon the sofa in the boudoir: Agnes was engaged in reading some instructive work. Winifred was introduced into the presence of the cousins,—Floribel taking little notice of her, while Agnes addressed her in the kindest manner. Winifred was by no means beautiful; she could scarcely even be called pretty: but her appearance was very interesting. There was a mildness in her blue eyes, and there was a softness in her voice, which went irresistibly to the heart that beat with generous sympathies. And such a heart was that of Agnes. She had been told by Rachel that Winifred was an orphan, and that she was devoted to an aged grandaunt who had long been the inmate of a debtor's goal; and this narrative was in itself sufficient to enlist Miss Evelyn's warmest interest on Miss Barrington's behalf. Indeed, tears of gratitude came into Winifred's eyes when she found how kindly Miss Evelyn spoke to her—how the young lady expressed the utmost satisfaction at the work which Winnie had brought home—how she could not think of paying so moderate a demand as that which the seamstress made for her labour—but how she insisted upon doubling the price—and how with the most considerate delicacy she turned aside to wrap up the money hastily in a little piece of paper, and then gently glided the packet into Winifred's hand.

"Have you walked all the way from your abode, Miss Barrington?" inquired Agnes.

The response was in the affirmative.

"What! with that large band-box and bundle?" exclaimed Miss Evelyn. "Oh, then I am sure

you must stand in need of rest and refreshment—and you shall have both!"

Ringing the bell, Miss Evelyn consigned Winifred to the care of Rachel,—assuring the young seamstress that by the time she had recruited her strength the other materials which she had come to fetch should be in readiness for her. A hurriedly whispered instruction to Rachel from the lips of Agnes, informed the good-hearted servant-woman how Miss Barrington was to be treated: she was not therefore taken to the kitchen, but was conducted to the breakfast-parlour, where a tray covered with refreshments was speedily placed before her. Miss Evelyn then purposely delayed looking out the promised materials, in order that Winifred might have the longer interval to refresh and rest herself. At length, when Agnes began to address herself to that task, a visitress arrived at the villa. This was Cicely Neale, who was shown into the drawing-room; and thither Floribel at once repaired, Agnes intimating that she would follow in a few minutes.

Miss Lister was rejoiced that some one had thus arrived to break in upon the gloomy feeling which her dream had left behind it; and the welcome she gave Miss Neale was therefore exceedingly cordial. Cicely not merely owed a call to the cousins at Sidney Villa; but she likewise had a special object of her own to serve—namely, to discover whether a certain person was indeed led to visit at that place by any tender sentiment—and if so, to which of the two cousins his addresses were being paid. We should observe that Cicely knew nothing of the recent duel; for the whispered rumour thereof had extended but through-out a very limited circle—and Mr. Timperley had said not a syllable upon the point to either his wife or niece.

After some general conversation with Floribel, Miss Neale thought of turning the discourse in the channel which she hoped might serve her purpose. She began by asking Miss Lister if she did not feel dull living in such a comparatively secluded neighbourhood?—to which question Floribel replied, with a languid air, that the time certainly hung heavy on her hands occasionally, but that they were not without visitors. Cicely, with a smile, begged Miss Lister to run over the catalogue of these visitors,—adding, "You must not think me impertinent: but as I mean, with your permission, to call upon you frequently—and as we are to be very great friends, you know—I am anxious to learn whom I may have a chance of encountering here."

"Many, if not most of our friends—especially the lady-ones," responded Floribel, "are likewise acquaintances of Mrs. Timperley. But I think we have some few who are not known to your uncle and aunt. For instance, there is Lord Mervyn," she continued,—"the eldest son of the Earl of Willsborough—"

"What sort of a person is he?" asked Cicely.

"Not a very bright young nobleman," replied Floribel: "he has not much to say for himself—and is very fond of repeating his words. The Hon. Mr. Clifford is infinitely more agreeable. Then there is Mr. Lowden—very well connected and very insipid. We used to be visited also by the Hon. Mr. Hardress—Ah! and then there is Mr. De Vere, who though only a government

clerk, is certainly a very nice young gentleman. He lives close by. As for Mr. Hardress, I do not think he will ever make his appearance at Sidney Villa again——"

"Is he ill? or has he gone abroad?" inquired Miss Neale; "or what else is the reason that deprives you of so aristocratic a visitor?"

"Hush!" said Floribel: "I hear Agnes' footsteps—and she does not like me to indulge in what she would call gossiping."

Miss Evelyn now made her appearance,—having taken the promised materials to Winnie Barrington, who had already enjoyed a good hour's rest at the hospitable villa. But Rachel still detained her there a little longer in conversation; so that Cicely Neale presently took her departure before Winifred.

We must now leave them for a brief space, while we transfer the attention of the reader to Belmont Cottage; for on this particular day of which we are writing, a perfect cloud of incidents, all of greater or lesser importance, as will presently be seen, were destined to take place, either simultaneously or in rapid succession.

It was about one o'clock, when Mr. Timperley called, according to appointment, at Belmont Cottage. He found Mrs. De Vere awaiting his arrival; and the instant Margaret had retired and the door had closed, the lady said to him, "We must be quick with our discourse, Mr. Timperley: for Charles intimated in the morning that he should be home very early this afternoon in order to take me out for a walk. You have not come in a cab, I see——"

"No—I rode in the omnibus to Camden Town," replied Mr. Timperley; "and I walked thence to Belmont Cottage. What tidings have you for me? Did you question your son?"

"I have but little more to add to what you already know," rejoined Mrs. De Vere. "It almost seems as if Charles had an aversion to be esteched on the subject—which is only natural indeed, for he looked upon the duel with the greatest horror. He tells me that during the last three months he has occasionally met Mr. Hardress, who was always very civil and courteous towards him: but he assures me that the lady concerning whom the quarrel took place, was a perfect stranger to him."

"To whom?—to your son?" demanded Mr. Timperley.

"Yes—a stranger to Charles," replied Mrs. De Vere. "I have now no more to tell you. It is quite evident that the dispute had nothing to do with either of the cousins at Sidney Villa; or else Charles would have at once confessed it."

Mr. Timperley reflected for a few moments; and then he said, "What if Charles were to be appointed junior *attaché* to some foreign Embassy—or to be removed to the storekeeper's office at Portsmouth, Plymouth, or some place remote from London? Do you not think it would be better?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Mrs. De Vere, vehemently and gratefully; "for a thousand reasons it would! The idea of coming to London never pleased me: what could I do? His lordship insisted on idling for Charles in his present position; and now, Mr. Timperley, how imperious his lordship is in having his will obeyed."

"Do you think," inquired the lawyer, "that the friendship between the two young men will be renewed after the duel—and that it will even be cemented by the very fact itself?"

"At all events, Mr. Timperley," replied Mrs. De Vere, "these are casualties to be guarded against. You have seen his lordship?"

"I saw him last evening," responded the solicitor. "We talked the matter over: I said that I was to see you again to-day, and I would inquire whether you had any objection to either one of the propositions which I have just made on behalf of your son?—You have none; and therefore in a few days you may be prepared to learn that some better appointment has been procured for him—but at a distance from London."

"Oh! assure his lordship that I shall only be too grateful!" cried Mrs. De Vere.

Mr. Timperley rose to take his departure; and recollecting something, he asked, "Do you know where Sir John Dalham's villa is situated? I am aware that he has some such pretty little place out in this neighbourhood: I called at his town residence last evening, and learnt that he was at St. John's Wood. I want to see him—and I may as well kill two birds with one stone."

Mrs. De Vere happened to know where Sir John Dalham's suburban villa was situated, about a mile distant from her own cottage; and she described the route to Mr. Timperley. He accordingly took his leave.

Mrs. De Vere saw by the time-piece that it was now two o'clock; and she went up-stairs to put on her bonnet and shawl—for at this hour Charles was to return home. Scarcely had she finished her toilet, and descended to look forth from the front door to see if that son whom she so dearly loved was as yet coming up the road, when she beheld Mrs. Chicklade approaching. This woman was even more flauntingly dressed than when we described her interviews with Cicely Neale; and she affected a juvenility of apparel which was absolutely ridiculous. She had on a large straw hat with flowing ribbons; and she was bedizened with jewellery—most of it of a sufficiently trumpery description. Mrs. De Vere was recoiling in mingled disgust and terror from the threshold of the door,—when Mrs. Chicklade, with a smile, or rather insolent leer upon her countenance, motioned her to stop. Mrs. De Vere was paralysed by the mysterious power that the vile woman wielded over her; and though all trembling, she was transfixed to the threshold of the open front door of the cottage.

"I am not coming to trouble you to-day," said Mrs. Chicklade, stopping at the gate of the fence which bordered the little front garden: "I have got other game in hand. But I don't admire pride—and you were on the point of ruining indoors without speaking to me."

Mrs. De Vere was infinitely relieved when she found that the woman was not bent upon paying Belmont Cottage a visit; but still she could not give utterance to a word—for she could not bring herself to say anything courteous, and she dared not speak in an opposite sense.

"Pride indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Chicklade, determined to give herself airs and take offence at Mrs. De Vere's inclination to retreat into the house, "I should like to know what reason——"

"Hush, for heaven's sake!" interrupted Mrs. De Vere: "the servants will overhear you!—my son will be here in a moment!"

"And who cares about your servants or your son?" cried the insolent woman. "If I thought fit, and had time, I would walk in and use the house as if it was my own——"

"Never!" ejaculated Mrs. De Vere, now worked up to a pitch bordering upon frenzy. "Why do you torment me thus? Have I not dealt liberally towards you?"

"Yea—but the last time I was here you dared to threaten me," replied Mrs. Chicklade, who took a malignant pleasure in torturing the poor lady. "It is all very well for you to give yourself airs: but remember!"—and here she added some words in a very low voice and with a fiend-like sardonicism of countenance.

Mrs. De Vere, already very pale, now became absolutely ghastly; and she staggered back a pace or two, so that it was only by a sudden effort she could prevent herself from falling. Mrs. Chicklade gave utterance to a malignant laugh; and as if satisfied with the amount of pain that she had inflicted, she rapidly continued her way. Mrs. De Vere, without again glancing along the road in search of her son, retreated into the parlour; and sinking upon the sofa, gave way to her lamentations. In the bitterness of her grief she was so completely off her guard that she forgot her moans and sobbings and her impassioned ejaculations might be overheard by the cook or housemaid, if either happened to be nigh: but fortunately for her they were both beyond earshot at the time.

"Wretched, infamous woman!" ejaculated Mrs. De Vere; "evil genius that has crossed my path! fatal spectre that seems doomed to haunt me! Oh, if ever there were a moment when I felt inclined to do some desperate deed to rid myself for ever of your persecutions—it is now!"

"For God's sake, my dear mother, what is the matter?" asked Charles, as he suddenly rushed into the room. "But I need scarcely inquire! That hag has been here again! I met her—I know her despite her tawdry fiery! Methought that she leered impudently upon me! Oh, my dear mother! there is some mystery attached to this wretch!—it is not through mere charity that you have assisted her—you must know, as well as I now do, that she is no deserving object for such bounty!—and yet she comes to you!"

"It is nothing, my dear boy—she did not come to me—I declare positively she did not!" exclaimed Mrs. De Vere, speaking vehemently. "I was thinking of other things——"

"Pardon me, my dear mother!" interrupted Charles, deeply distressed: "but this is evasion on your part—though doubtless for a kind purpose. My ear caught the words which you were uttering: they were words of terrible import—and, Oh, my dear mother! it could have been no ordinary provocation that evoked such language from the lips of one so good, so kind, so amiable as you are!"

"My dear boy," answered Mrs. De Vere, even more distressed than her son, and terribly bewildered what reply to give,— "there are dark moments that come over me—and in those moods I scarcely know what I say! Words over which I have no control escape my lips—and then I am

cruelly distressed to think that I could have been so unguarded—so foolish!"

"Well, my dear mother," interrupted Charles, unwilling to inflict additional anguish on his beloved parent, though he was very far from satisfied with the excuses which she had just made,— "let us say no more upon the subject."

"No, not another word!" cried Mrs. De Vere, as if immensely relieved by what her son had just said. "The dark mood has passed now—I am once again contented—tranquillized—happy—for you are with me! You see that I am all ready to accompany you in the pleasant walk which we promised ourselves for this afternoon,—and now, my dearest Charles, let me not behold a shade upon your countenance—for you shall see none on mine!"

"Oh, I would do anything to render you happy, my dear mother!" exclaimed young De Vere, affectionately embracing his parent. "Come, let us sally forth," he added, assuming a cheerful tone: "the weather is beautiful—it is the delicious autumn season of the year—and the fresh air will do you good."

The mother and son accordingly walked forth together,—not repairing towards the Regent's Park, which was their usual lounge—but proceeding in the contrary direction, so as to get as much as possible into the most secluded spots.

We must now return to Miss Neale—who, as we have stated, took her departure from Sidney Villa before Winifred Barrington had finished the conversation in which Rachel was detaining her in the parlour while Cicely had been engaged with the two young ladies in the drawing-room. Mrs. Timperley had brought Miss Neale in her carriage as far as the Zoological Gardens in the Regent's Park—which the lawyer's wife, with a lady-friend, had gone to visit. Cicely was to rejoin Mrs. Timperley there: but on issuing forth from Sidney Villa, she found that she had still a good hour to dispose of. Indeed she had mistaken the time—or else she would have prolonged her call upon the two cousins. Having certain affairs occupying her mind, Cicely was in no mood to roam about with two elderly ladies, looking at wild beasts, monkeys, reptiles, and birds: she would rather be alone with her own thoughts. She therefore decided upon rambling a little while in the neighbourhood where she now found herself; and perhaps to this conclusion she was somewhat impelled by the hope of falling in with the individual whose image was uppermost in her mind—the one concerning whom she had received certain information from Mrs. Chicklade, and relative to whom likewise she had endeavoured to obtain intelligence at Sidney Villa.

Cicely had not gone very far ere she caught a glimpse of a female figure which she thought was familiar to her; still she could scarcely believe that the old harpid had gone to such an outrageous length as to deck herself with a large straw hat and long streaming ribbons. But in a few moments Miss Neale acquired the certainty that it was indeed none other than Mrs. Chicklade; and an expression of bitter annoyance swept over the countenance of the young lady as she murmured to herself, "The old wretch is determined to interfere in my affairs! For what other purpose could she possibly be here?"

Cicely was on the point of turning away and proceeding in some other direction, so as to avoid a meeting with Mrs. Chicklade,—when a second thought struck her.

"If she persist in thus meddling with matters which concern only myself, she will end by compromising me seriously. I have a difficult game to play: it must be played well and prudently: a single false step on my part, or any meddling folly on the part of another, may destroy everything! Besides, to think that this vile wretch should dare thrust herself forward! No—by heaven! it shall be put an end to, I care not how!"

Such were the rapid musings of Cicely Neale; and when she arrived at this final decision, her rich red lips were compressed as if with the firm resoluteness that had taken possession of her soul. She quickened her pace, and speedily came up with Mrs. Chicklade. The old woman was nothing abashed on perceiving Cicely: perhaps she rather expected such a meeting than otherwise.

"One word with you!—follow me!" said Miss Neale in a peremptory and indeed imperious tone—as if it were she who had a right to command, and as if so far from feeling that she was in the old woman's power, it was she herself who in reality had the means of coercion within her reach.

She turned into a lane leading between some fields which the hands of speculating builders had not as yet begun to deface; and Mrs. Chicklade followed, until a sufficiently secluded spot for the interview was reached. There Miss Neale suddenly stopped short; and turning round upon Mrs. Chicklade, she demanded in a resolute, almost stern voice, "What are you doing in this neighbourhood?"

"I may as well ask what you yourself are doing," replied Mrs. Chicklade insolently. "I suppose the streets, roads, alleys, lanes, and other thoroughfares of London and its neighbourhood are as open to me as they are to you——"

"Cease this impertinence!" interrupted Cicely, her large blue eyes, which were usually of a soft expression, now flashing the sudden fire of indignation. "All this jargon on your side would be very well under ordinary circumstances: but it is otherwise with you and me. I bade you beware, the day before yesterday, how you ever again crossed my path——"

"And what if I care not for your threats?—what if I threaten in return?" demanded Mrs. Chicklade: but still she could not be altogether as insolent as at this moment she wished; for there was something in the resolute looks of Cicely Neale—something in the haughty carriage of that fine tall form now drawn up to its full height—which cowed and overawed the coarse vulgar mind of the old woman.

"You have addressed me in this language before," responded Cicely; "and I have told you that I am not moved by your threats. Tell the tale if you will—and who will believe you? To whom that I care about, can you obtain access to tell your tale at all? I who have experienced so much, and have yet so much to do in the world, am not to be intimidated by such a comparative trifle as your menace. But observe!—and understand me well! I am vindictive, horribly vindic-

tive!—and if you dare again cross my path, I will crush you as I would a worm! Now you understand how it is I am enabled to defy you, and why it is that I do not dread you. By nature good, kind, and generous—though I say it of myself—yet am I capable of any deed—aye, even the extremest, to rid myself of one who dares haunt me, or who dares intrude upon the path which I am pursuing!"

"Do you mean, Miss, that you would murder me?" asked Mrs. Chicklade, now actually frightened at Cicely's flaming looks, sternly resolute language, and dilating form: for the old woman felt herself to be attenuated and feeble—and there she was, in a lonely spot, in the presence of a tall fine-grown young person in all the vigour of health and strength.

"Murder you?" ejaculated Cicely. "Ask me if I would place my heel upon the venomous reptile that was insidiously gliding towards me to plunge its fangs into my flesh!—ask me, in a word, if driven to the extremity of turning round in self-defence, I would not do anything to rid myself of one who seems resolved to become my foe! And this is not the first time I have said to myself that you are a wretch of that odious nature—a vile creature of that abominable stamp, which would almost justify a crime as the means of ridding one-self of you!"

While Cicely was thus speaking, in language partly fierce, partly scornful, and partly abhorrent, a suspicion stole into the mind of Mrs. Chicklade. She knew herself to be a coward with all her insolent bullying; and she thought that Cicely, having fathomed her real character, was endeavouring to overawe and intimidate her by means of threats which she was in reality altogether incapable of carrying out. This idea, although associated with her own innate consciousness of cowardice, inspired the old woman with courage; and she exclaimed, "Very well, Miss! you choose to threaten me—you think fit to make me your enemy! I wanted to be your friend—I came up into this neighbourhood to watch and observe what might be going on, so that I might bring you the necessary information: but as it is——"

"Cease, vile woman!—irritate me no more!" ejaculated Cicely; "or by heavens, I shall do you a mischief! Beware! I give you due warning!"—and the naturally mild blue eyes of Miss Neale were now flashing forth vivid fires; while her fine if not handsome countenance was distorted with the fierceness of her emotions; and her superb bust was swelling and dilating as if it would burst its prisonage of corset. "Beware, I repeat!—say not another word to irritate me—or as you are now a living woman, you shall in a few minutes be a dead one! I will fly at your throat—my fingers shall tighten like an iron vice upon your neck—I will throttle you!"

Mrs. Chicklade was now once again completely cowed, affrighted, and overawed. Cicely seemed to be inspired with the fury of a demoness; and all the wickedness of a fiend was for a few moments depicted on that countenance which usually expressed far softer feelings, blenden even, as we have formerly said, with a certain subdued air of sensuousness. The old woman was evidently bewildered for a brief space what to say or how to act—until she was started from her

consternation by the sudden peremptory lifting of Cicely's arm, accompanied by the abrupt utterance of the words, "You have heard me—you understand me—and now begone!"

Mrs. Chicklade turned away; and for about a minute she walked rapidly along the lane: then she relaxed her pace—glanced over her shoulder—and perceiving that Cicely was still standing on the spot where she had left her, she took courage at finding that there was such an interval between herself and that young lady who for a while had seemed to be inspired with all the fiercest passions of a demoness. True to her character of a malignant female-bully when she fancied herself to be safe, Mrs. Chicklade shrieked forth, "Ah! you would kill me—would you? Beware!—you have made me your mortal enemy—and we shall see whether you are in reality so indifferent as you pretend to be with regard to all I can tell!"

Having thus vented her fury, Mrs. Chicklade again turned and darted along the lane until it joined the main road,—where she felt that she was completely safe.

Cicely had advanced a step or two on being thus menaced and taunted by the vile woman; and then she had suddenly stopped short, while her countenance became ghastly with rage—the rich hue fled from her full pouting lips, leaving them livid white—and her eyes flashed sinister fires. Thus she stood for a few moments; and it was not easy to fathom the precise nature of the dark thoughts that were passing in her mind. She moved not until Mrs. Chicklade was lost to her view; and then, muttering something to herself, Miss Neale followed rapidly in the same direction.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LANE.

We must now return to Winifred Barrington, whom we left at Sidney Villa, still engaged in conversation with the good-hearted parlour-maid Rachel, who had conceived a great interest in the young seamstress in consequence of the very favourable representations which Mr. Williams, the baker, had put forth concerning her.

"And do you think, my dear Miss Barrington," asked Rachel, "that your grandfather will in reality gain this law-suit in the long run?"

"I do not know—I hope so," replied Winifred. "It has lasted for a great number of years: but Mr. Timperley called yesterday——"

"Mr. Timperley?" ejaculated Rachel. "Is he your grandfather's lawyer?"

"Yes," responded Winnie: "he has been his solicitor for the last seventeen or eighteen years—ever since the death of his former attorney, Mr. Waldron. I have often heard my grandfather say so."

"How singular!" said Rachel. "You do not know, then, that these ladies—my young mistresses—are the granddaughters of that same Mr. Waldron of whom you have just been speaking?"

"No—I never heard it before," rejoined Winifred in astonishment. "But you must remember that this is only the second time I have been to Sidney Villa——"

"I am sure that Miss Evelyn," interrupted Rachel, "will, if possible, become all the more interested in you on this very account. Ah! I should add that the young ladies are well acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Timperley: indeed it is their niece Miss Neale who has just been here to call."

"Oh, then, perhaps your young ladies will speak to Mr. Timperley on my grandfather's behalf?" said Winifred: and then by her looks she appeared as if she regretted having proffered the request.

"Miss Lister, though as kind-hearted a young lady as any I ever knew," responded Rachel, "is scarcely likely to give herself any trouble in the matter: but Miss Evelyn will joyfully do all she can to serve you. You must however tell me in what manner she can advance your grandfather's interests. Does not Mr. Timperley perform his duty? You may speak candidly to me, my dear Miss Barrington: do not be afraid to explain what is passing in your mind."

Thus encouraged, Winnie said, "I understand very little of all these law-affairs: but still I fancy that my poor grandfather has at times had some reason to believe that Mr. Timperley might have pushed on his business with a little more rapidity. Still I must frankly confess that Mr. Timperley is doing it all on speculation; and therefore it is not to be supposed he would put himself to any extraordinary degree of expense, because there is the chance that he may never obtain a single farthing of his costs."

"I am sure," exclaimed Rachel, "that Miss Evelyn will say a good word to Mr. Timperley for your poor grandfather. You told me, I think, that he was once rich——"

"Yes—very rich: but that was before I was born," responded Winifred. "Heaven grant that even if he do not become rich again, he may at least acquire sufficient to pay off the liabilities which keep him a prisoner in that dreadful place: though I fear that——"

"Are those liabilities heavy?" inquired Rachel.

"I do not exactly know," rejoined Winifred. "But from some few little things which I have gleaned at times, I fancy that it is not so much the amount that originally kept my grandfather in prison, as the complicated nature of the affairs themselves. But now I fear that if the prison-doors were thrown open and he was told that he was free, he would not avail himself of his liberty: for he has grown very eccentric and peculiar—and he has over and over again vowed that he will never leave the gaol unless it be as a rich man, the gainer of his suit, and with his own carriage in attendance at the gate to receive and bear him off."

"How singular!" ejaculated Rachel. "Do you think, my dear Miss Barrington, the poor old gentleman's mind has grown morbid?"

"He is in the full possession of his intellects," replied Winnie: "but still, you know, the ideas must necessarily become limited to a very narrow circle under the influence of so long an imprisonment. It is likewise only too natural that some of these ideas should take the aspect of prejudices, and in that sense become firmly rooted in the mind."

"Ah, true!" said Rachel, with a sympathetic sigh. "You are of course aware that your grand-

father's opponent, Sir John Dalham, possesses a beautiful little villa at no great distance hence—a mile or so away?"

"I know it," said Winifred, in a tone that was more subdued than that in which she had previously been speaking; and for an instant a slight flush crossed her countenance.

The good-hearted Rachel conceived that she was touching on a delicate and painful topic when thus alluding to Sir John Dalham, whom Winifred might naturally regard as her grandsire's persecutor and foe; and she therefore hastened to change the topic. The discourse was continued for a little while longer; and then Winifred took her departure, carrying her handbox in one hand and a small bundle in the other—this latter containing the materials which Agnes had ere now given her to be made up into morning-dresses.

Just as Winifred emerged from the iron gate belonging to the grounds of Sidney Villa, she beheld a gentleman approaching at a little distance; and she immediately recognised him. The recognition was mutual; and the gentleman seemed pleased as well as surprised to behold Miss Barrington there. He was about forty years of age—of moderate stature, of slim figure, and with a tolerably good-looking countenance: He had dark hair and whiskers—an aquiline nose—a well-shaped mouth—and a pair of dark piercing eyes. The expression of those eyes as well as the general contour of the features indicated strong passions, which might be moved either for good or for evil, but which would go to the extreme according to whichever impulse they obeyed. He was handsomely dressed, and was evidently a gentleman by social position as well as in appearance.

"Ah, Winifred—you here?" he said, for a moment stopping as Miss Barrington saluted him with a respectful courtesy, which nevertheless was constrained and embarrassed, while the colour went and came in rapid transitions upon her cheeks. "One word with you!" continued the gentleman: "but not here, in sight of those windows," he added, glancing through the bars of the gate towards Sidney Villa. "It would be compromising you. If you have time, come on for a few moments to the lane."

Winifred signified assent by a slight inclination of the head; and the gentleman passed rapidly along the road, she following at a distance which would not lead any observer to imagine that she was thus purposely pursuing the same track. By the way in which he had alluded to *the lane*, and in which she had implied her assent to his proposal that she should join him there, it was evident enough that she was no stranger to the place—while indeed the inference would be that she had met the gentleman there before. As she walked along, with her handbox and her bundle, there was a profound pensiveness in her looks; so that for a while she did not even attempt to struggle against whatsoever emotions were agitating within her.

A walk of about ten minutes brought Winifred to the lane, into which the gentleman had already proceeded; and it was the same wherein Cicely Nonale's encounter with Mrs. Chicklade had occurred about half-an-hour previously. The lane was narrow and shaded with trees: there was moreover a bend in it which at a certain distance

might shield any one from being seen by the passers-by in the road from which it diverged. It was just beyond this bend that the gentleman stopped to await Winifred's coming up: and in a few moments she joined him there.

Dropping her handbox upon the green sward which bordered the lane, and placing the bundle on the top of it, Miss Barrington stood with downcast eyes in the presence of that gentleman. There was still a certain restraint in her looks and manner; but it would have been difficult for an uninitiated observer to define from what source this feeling of embarrassment arose.

"How is your grandfather, Winifred?" asked the gentleman, in a voice that was kind, and with looks that grew soft as his naturally piercing eyes were bent upon her.

"He enjoys good health," answered Miss Barrington, only for an instant raising her own looks, and immediately bending them down again. "His spirits are good likewise—because," she added hesitatingly, "he is now full of hope once more—or rather I should say, that hope of his has acquired feverish strength: for of itself it has never abandoned him."

The gentleman reflected in silence for upwards of a minute; and then he said, "Can I not be of any assistance to you to-day, Winifred? This meeting was an accidental one—but still I thought that possibly—"

"No, sir—I thank you," she interrupted him, with a firmness that notwithstanding had something deeply respectful in it. "To a certain extent I have accepted your bounty—your charity—"

"Use not such terms as these, Winifred!" cried the gentleman: "you pain and afflict me infinitely. Have you not a thousand claims?—am I not bound—"

"No—I have never regarded it in that light," responded Winifred. "Your conduct has proved most generous towards me:—in my heart I am grateful, even though with the lips I speak so little of gratitude, and though my manner may perhaps be equally deficient in expressing it. But Oh! you can full well comprehend what I must feel when standing in your presence—scarcely able to look you in the face—"

"Winifred, this is foolish!" interrupted the gentleman, now modulating his voice to accents the softness of which might have been sympathy or tenderness, we cannot at present say which: "and I have told you over and over again that it is thus foolish! Give not way to these emotions: You know what in my own heart I think of you—or else my conduct would not have been what it has! Cheer up, Winifred—"

"Sir," she interrupted him, in a tremulous voice, "I think that this is the last time I shall meet you—at least under such circumstances—though heaven knows whether we ever *can* meet in the world otherwise than stealthily. But—"

"What mean you, Winifred?" asked the gentleman: "what mean you when you say that you think this is the last time?"

"I have found so kind a friend," responded Miss Barrington, "in a young lady at that house from which you ere now saw me issue, that by mine own industry alone—for the exercise of which she has promised to furnish me ample occupation, and

the recompense she gives is so generous—in a word, sir, I hope and trust that henceforth I shall no longer be compelled to receive from your bounty that which my own labour will be competent to produce.”

Again the gentlemen reflected deeply for upwards of a minute; and then he said, “Are you sure, Winifred, that you are giving expression to your thoughts with the most perfect regard to truthfulness?—or is this a mere delicate excuse on your part to put an end to our meetings?”

“No!” she exclaimed, with something like vehemence: “if such were my sole purpose, I should not have sought a pretext—I should frankly and candidly explain it now.”

“Yes, I think you would—I am sure you would!” ejaculated the gentlemen; “and yet I may as well give utterance to that which I was ere now on the point of saying. Listen, Winifred! If you be inspired only by the thought of putting an end to these meetings, I will cheerfully make an arrangement by which at some place, and under suitable circumstances of secrecy, you may continue to receive the same sum which you have hitherto thought fit to accept at my hands—or any other sum that you may name, be it ten times as much——”

“No, sir!” she again interrupted him; and now she looked full in his face as she spoke. “I am devising no pretext—I require none. For my own sake alone I would have never, never accepted the slightest bounty at your hands; and this you know—though it may indeed appear ungracious and ungrateful on my part to speak in such terms. But for my grandfather—that poor helpless old man—Oh, no! I could not see him want; and therefore—But you know the rest!”

“And do you think, Winifred,” asked the gentleman, “that you have now a prospect of earning a sum sufficient for all your requirements?”

“I hope so—I believe so, she replied. “If not, sir, I shall not hesitate to avail myself of your bounty again. And now we must part. I would say much to you: indeed when first I resolved, scarcely half-an-hour back, upon taking the step with regard to you which I have been explaining, I fancied that at our next interview I should have much to say. But whether it be that this interview has taken place with an unexpected suddenness, at a moment when it was so little looked for—or whether it be that a crowd of harrowing and torturing thoughts, of which you can full well comprehend the nature, has overwhelmed in my mind all to which I had intended to give utterance—I cannot say. Certain it is, however, that I must now leave much unsaid—unless it be to give you the parting assurance of that feeling which alone can subsist in my heart after everything that has taken place between us. I have done, sir. And now farewell!—leave me!”

The gentleman lingered however for a few moments: he seemed desirous to say something, and yet hesitated to give utterance to it. At length he abruptly exclaimed, “Farewell then, Winifred! What! not even your hand at parting?”

“Oh, yes!” she said: and she placed her hand in his own.

“God bless you!” he cried: and again it was with a look that might be either deepest sympathy

or else a still more tender feeling, we cannot say.—then suddenly dropping her hand, he hurried off, passing farther along the lane, and was speedily lost to her view.

Winifred remained standing upon the spot where he had left her: but now, instead of there being a profound dejection in her look, there was a certain air of satisfaction, although mournful—and her bosom heaved and fell slowly with a long deep-drawn sigh. Almost immediately afterwards she heard a movement in the hedge at a little distance; and glancing in that direction, she started as if a reptile had stung her, on beholding the person who was making her way through an opening where her garments rustled against the bushes.

“Ah, Miss Barrington! is it you?” exclaimed the woman, whom our readers have doubtless already suspected to be Mrs. Chicklade. “Well, this is strange! I am destined to meet numbers of my former acquaintances to-day—and all within the space of an hour or two. I caught a glimpse of that gentleman as he was taking leave of you after pressing your hand so fervently; and I recognised him in a moment. I am glad that you and he still—But what ails the girl? Are you too going to show off your airs and treat me with indignity?”

“I do not wish to insult you,” answered Winifred, shrinking in affright from the sudden fierceness of look which Mrs. Chicklade bent upon her: “but I really would rather that you should not know me—that you should not notice me——”

“Which is as much as to say,” ejaculated the woman, “that you are ashamed of your old friend!”

“Friend?” echoed Winifred, her cheeks glowing with a sudden indignation; and the same galvanic shock seemed to vibrate through every nerve, inspiring her with the strength and courage to repudiate the idea of friendship with such a creature.

“Yes—friend, I said,” rejoined Mrs. Chicklade. “And what then? Did I not prove your friend? Had it not been for me, would you have known him whom you have just met so stealthily and who pressed your hand so fervently—doubtless leaving something substantial in it?”

Winifred was now worked up to such a pitch of indignation that all alarm on account of the woman’s violence was dispelled in order to give place to the stronger feelings of loathing, disgust, and abhorrence. Her gentle nature appeared to be for the time being utterly changed; and with crimson cheeks as well as with flashing eyes, she exclaimed, “Begone, vile woman! Every word you utter is a foul insult! Leave me! Our paths lie different in the world—although for a single moment they may once have seemed to meet!”

“Oh, it is thus that you also defy me?” ejaculated the woman, boiling with indignation! “It is the same with all of you. If I serve you yesterday, you treat me with scorn to-day. But, Ah! may I not be avenged to-morrow? Look you, Miss Barrington! Do you think I am ignorant that in Whitecross-street prison there is an old man—your grandfather—who believes you to be everything he could wish——”

“And surely human nature is not so bad,” exclaimed Winifred, a dead pallor now overspreading her countenance,—“surely the heart of no woman



is so fiendishly malignant—so thoroughly depraved—as to suffer that the lips should breathe aught, whether true or false, into the ear of that poor old man, which may add to the afflictions he already endures, and which for a quarter of a century he has known!”

“Ah! I have touched you—have I?” exclaimed Mrs. Chicklade, with a savage malignity of countenance.

“But no! no!—he would not believe it!” cried Miss Barrington: “he would not believe it! He loves me too well—he has too much faith in me—”

“Do not flatter yourself that it is so.” ejaculated the woman. “Could I not tell a tale that would convince him? Aye!—and here is the proof—here is the reward I received!” she continued, drawing off her glove and displaying a ring

NO. 9.—AGNES.

upon the little finger of her right hand. “It was your mother’s—you told me so at the time—”

“Oh, my God!”—and Winifred wrung her hands bitterly; then goaded to desperation by the threats which Mrs. Chicklade had held out, and which the poor girl knew she was only too capable of carrying into execution, she cried, “Swear that you will not do me this mischief, or I shall do you a worse one first! There is the feeling of the tigress within me—”

“Hush, fool!—we are observed!” suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Chicklade, waving her hands menacingly.

Mrs. De Vere and Charles had, as the reader is aware, set out for their walk in the most secluded neighbourhood of their residence; and it chanced, or else it was willed by fate, that they should come suddenly upon the scene which the bend in

the lane now revealed to their view—the young milliner and the old woman engaged in vehement dispute.

"It is the hag!—that old wretch!" ejaculated Charles.

"For heaven's sake, let us retire!" said Mrs. De Vere in accents of the most painful and earnest entreaty—at the same time that she literally dragged back her son sufficiently round the bend in the lane to shut out the two disputants from their view. "Come quick, my dear boy!—it is no business of our's!"

"By heaven, my dear mother," ejaculated the generous youth, "it is my business!—for that fiendish old woman is capable of doing that young girl a mischief!"—and he disengaged himself from his mother's arm, which was grasping his own tightly.

"Come with me!—come with me, I command you!" she cried, almost frantic.

"My dear mother," he responded, firmly yet kindly, "in all things would I obey you where you have a right to exact my filial obedience. But here is a case in which I *must* and *will* interfere! I have already seen enough of that vile hag to know that she is capable of any degree of intimidation!"

These words were spoken with feverish haste—yet, as we have already said, with mingled kindness and firmness. Charles was about to rush away, when Mrs. De Vere, again seizing him by the arm, passionately cried, "Stay, I entreat you!"

"Pardon me, mother—forgive me for this violence!—but I *must*—I *will*!"

He now again disengaged himself from his parent's frenzied grasp; and saying, "I will overtake you in a few minutes!" he rushed back towards the spot where he had caught a glimpse of the young girl and the old woman.

All that we have described as having taken place between Charles and his mother, occupied indeed but a few moments; and he therefore quickly reappeared round the bend in the lane, in the presence of Mrs. Chicklade and Winifred Barrington. They were now gazing at each other in silence, as if waiting for a sufficient interval to elapse for those who had ere now become transient witnesses of the scene to get beyond earshot ere they renewed their discourse. It was with a firm step and decisive look that Charles advanced towards them; and returning with a look of scornful defiance the malignant leer of the old woman, he turned to Winifred, saying, "What harm is this wretch doing you? Look upon me as your protector!"

"I think," said Mrs. Chicklade, "you had better leave us, sir, to settle our own quarrel by ourselves—or else I may perhaps tell you something that you would little like to hear."

"Silence, vile woman!" exclaimed our young hero: "you are dealing with one who defies your menaces—and you may thank your sex that you are not levelled with the ground!—Come with me, Miss," he added, again addressing himself to Winifred, "I will conduct you to a place of safety."

"She dares not go with you!" said Mrs. Chicklade, now perfectly cool and collected in the gloating enjoyment of her malignity. "You will remain here, Miss Barrington—will you not?" and

she bent a significant look upon Winifred, at the same time displaying the ring upon her hand.

"Yes, sir," said Winnie in faltering accents to Charles; "I prefer remaining here—we have something to talk about—I am not afraid of her—but I thank you very sincerely all the same for your kind intentions."

Mrs. Chicklade bent upon Charles a look of sardonic triumph, as she said, "You see I was right! and now take care that I don't find you out presently—But no matter! Opportunity will serve for that purpose!"

"And is it really your wish," asked young De Vere of Winifred, "that I should retire, leaving you in the company of this woman—whose threats I utterly disdain?"

"Yes, it is my wish," responded Miss Barrington.

Charles fancied that there was something very peculiar in the expression of her countenance—something half wild, half vacant; and he therefore hesitated for a few moments. But he had really no pretext for tarrying there any longer: he had done all that was consistent with his generous sense of duty; and he felt that any additional interference on his part would assume an aspect of downright obtrusiveness or impertinent curiosity. He therefore bowed to Miss Barrington, and slowly retired.

Retracing his way round the bend in the lane, he looked forward in search of his mother: but he could not see her. He was surprised—for he fancied that she would have lingered for him, though even if she had walked on at her usual pace, she still could not be at any great distance. He continued his way, marvelling what had become of her,—deeply grieved that he should have offended her for an object for which after all his services were not required,—and even still more poignantly distressed at the idea of the mysterious connexion, of some sort or another, which evidently subsisted between herself and the old hag. His former suspicion on this head had just been most painfully confirmed by the dark threats which Mrs. Chicklade had flung out against himself—and which, when taken in connexion with the strange and terrific words he had only an hour back heard issuing from his mother's lips, seemed to indicate that over that parent of his the infamous women wielded some strong power.

While tortured with these reflections, Charles pursued his way till he reached a point where two roads branched off, either of which would lead him towards Belmont Cottage, but one being a somewhat nearer route than the other. He struck into that shorter one: for he fancied that his mother might have proceeded more quickly than usual, and that she was already perhaps advancing along this particular road on her way homeward. Charles went at a swift pace: but the end of the road was reached, and he beheld not Mrs. De Vere. A few minutes more and he was at the cottage. His mother had not returned. He waited for about a quarter of an hour; and then, as she came not, he fancied that he must have missed her by some unaccountable means, and that she might still be wandering about, equally surprised and anxious at his own disappearance. He therefore set out again in search of her—this time taking the longer route of the two to which we have alluded;

but as he threaded it, still no Mrs. De Vere was to be seen.

He now once more reached the tortuous lane which in recent pages has been so often alluded to; and he was inspired by curiosity to ascertain whether the old hag and the young milliner were still in the same spot. He advanced slowly round the bend in the lane: he came within sight of the place where he had so fruitlessly endeavoured to interfere in the quarrel; and a spectacle did indeed meet his eyes!

But very different was it from anything that he could possibly have anticipated; for there, upon the grass, lay the old hag, a lifeless corpse—and two police-constables were bending over her!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MURDER.—SIR JOHN DALHAM.

THE first glance had convinced Charles De Vere that the old woman was indeed a corpse; for her countenance was livid—the eyes, wide open, were fixed with a glassy stare—and as the policeman raised the form, it hung in a lifeless manner. Moreover, the ejaculations which our young hero caught issuing from the lips of the constables, confirmed the dreadful idea—even if any such confirmation were wanting at all. An indescribable horror seized upon the young man: he stopped short—and then staggered back, his hat falling from his head, and he only preserving himself from falling likewise by a sudden and powerfully exerted energy.

"Murder's work has been done here, sir!" said one of the policemen. "Look! there's the mark upon the unfortunate creature's neck. By Jove! it must have been hands of iron that grasped her with such effect!"

"She's been throttled—that's quite clear!" exclaimed the other constable.

Charles De Vere now approached close up to the spot; and he beheld the marks to which the policeman alluded. A fierce and deadly grips had indeed been taken of the wretched woman's throat: the traces of the fingers were there: the nails had left deep indentations in the flesh. A brooch—of a common and even trumpery character, which had fastened Mrs. Chickadee's scarf, or rather large silk cape which she wore—was smashed; so that one of the constables observed, "No doubt the murderer got his knee upon the poor wretch and held her down upon the grass while he throttled her."

"Yes," said Charles De Vere, giving audible expression to his dismayed and bewildered musings; "it could scarcely have been that girl whom I saw quarrelling with her!"

"A girl quarrelling with her?" ejaculated one of the officers, catching at what instantaneously struck him as a clue to the hideous mystery. "Be so kind, sir, as to tell us what you know."

"I repeat," said Charles, "it is impossible it could have been that girl. And yet——"

"Indeed, sir, you must explain yourself," exclaimed the officer firmly. "Whatever your thoughts on the subject may be——"

"I certainly did behold something," said Charles,

in a faltering tone; for he was dismayed and bewildered by a thousand horrible ideas. "In short, some little while back—half-an-hour or so—I was walking in this lane with my mother—I heard the sounds of altercation—I saw this unfortunate woman disputing with a young person having the air of a seamstress or milliner of a superior class——Indeed, if it had not been for her handboxes, I should have taken her to be a lady——"

"Did you hear any threats, sir, come from this young person's lips?" asked the constable who was performing the part of questioner.

"I certainly must admit that at the moment when I first became aware of the quarrel," responded Charles, though with hesitation thus giving utterance to the recollections which came back into his mind—for he was loth to criminate an interesting young female whom despite all suspicious circumstances he could scarcely bring himself to regard as the authoress of so foul a crime,—"I certainly must admit that she was speaking very vehemently——doubtless however she was much provoked. Ah! I remember, she said that there was the feeling of a tigress within her."

"Ah! she said that, sir—did she?" exclaimed the police-constable, glancing quickly at his companion, as much as to imply that they were on the right track to the discovery of the guilty person. "And what else did you hear, sir?"

"I was almost immediately afterwards upon this spot," replied De Vere. "The two females had at once ceased speaking on beholding my mother and myself—and I, thinking that the poor girl was being ill-treated, menaced, or coerced into mischief by this woman—I came forward, I say, to offer her my protection."

"And what then transpired, sir?" asked the constable.

"The young person refused all interference on my part," answered De Vere: "she said that she preferred remaining with the woman—that they had something to talk about—Ah! I recollect another thing too!" ejaculated Charles, feeling the absolute necessity of telling the whole truth, and all the more so inasmuch as each successive remembrance that arose in his mind tended all the more forcibly to criminate the young milliner.

"What else do you recollect, sir?" asked the constable.

"That the girl had a strange, half-wild, half-vacant look—so that I thought her reason was to some degree unsettled—or I should perhaps rather say that I scarcely knew what to think. But at all events this woman—and here he pointed to the corpse—"seemed to exercise some extraordinary power over her; for with a significant look, and merely displaying a ring——"

"A ring?" said the constable, inquiringly.

"Yes—I recollect perfectly," rejoined De Vere: "it was a ring on the little finger of her right hand——"

"But it is not here now!" interjected the constable, holding up the deceased woman's right hand, which was ungloved—and the glove itself was lying upon the grass.

"No—the ring is not there!" ejaculated Charles "But I have a perfect recollection——"

"Let us look at the other hand," interrupted the police-officer: and he drew off the glove.

"Here are three rings on these fingers—but none on the little finger."

"And neither of those rings," said Charles emphatically, "is the one that I saw. I could not help noticing it, because I thought there was something so significant in the way in which the woman displayed it—as if there were a secret connected with it, and she felt that she had the power of using it as a means of coercion. It was a lady's ring—a ruby in the middle, set round with pearls—I could not possibly be mistaken on this point!"

"It is an important one," observed the police-official, glancing at his companion, who nodded assent. "It does not seem that the person of the murdered woman has been rifled: as much jewellery as she was likely to have about her is still here, with the exception of that ring. The crime was not therefore perpetrated for the mere purpose of robbery—that's as clear as daylight! It looks like a deed of vengeance. But did you happen to hear any name mentioned?"

"Ah, I recollect!" said Charles: "the old woman addressed the young one as Miss Barrington. And now I think I have told you all I can possibly call to mind."

"Well, sir," responded the official, "you must be so good as to attend at the Coroner's Inquest to-morrow—and perhaps at the police-court, if we succeed in finding out this girl Barrington. Your name and address, if you please, sir?"

Charles produced his card, intimating at the same time that he was a clerk in the Home Office. The constables had noticed that he averted his eyes as much as possible from the hideously discoloured countenance of the murdered woman—and that when compelled by the incidents of the conversation to turn his looks upon the corpse, it was with a strong visible shuddering and with all the evidences of a profound horror. They therefore intimated that as the spectacle was one only too well calculated to shock his feelings, there was not the slightest necessity for him to remain any longer upon the spot. Charles De Vere thankfully availed himself of this permission to retire; and hastening away, he bent his steps homeward.

On first beholding the corpse of the woman, a thousand ideas, as we have already said, arose conflictingly in the young man's mind. Vividly he recollected how that hag had haunted his mother!—with equal vividness too had those words which that very afternoon he had caught from his mother's lips, flashed to his mind! "*Wretched, infamous woman! evil genius that has crossed my path! fatal spectre that seems doomed to haunt me! Oh, if ever there were a moment when I felt inclined to do some desperate deed to rid myself for ever of your persecutions, it is now!*"—Those were the words: and they swept into Charles De Vere's memory as if they were a shower of molten lead-drops smiting his brain. A horrible suspicion had thus for an instant crossed him in respect to his own mother: for why had she disappeared so mysteriously? why had he failed to overtake her? why had he not found her at the cottage on his return thither? No wonder, then, that he had staggered and nearly fallen, on first beholding the murdered woman!—but the effort with which he had so abruptly saved himself, was accompanied by the equally sweeping recollection

of the dispute between Miss Barrington and the old woman. Now, after all that had transpired—especially with the circumstance of the missing ring—Charles had no doubt that Mrs. Chicklade had met her death at the hands of the young seamstress; and he well-nigh loathed himself for having, though only for an instant, entertained as horrible a suspicion in respect to his own mother. He literally writhed as it were within his entire being, as he sped along towards Belmont Cottage; and in a voice of indescribable agony, he exclaimed aloud, "Forgive me, mother!—for God's sake forgive me!"

It was in a state of wild excitement that he reached his home; and on hastening into the parlour, he found Mrs. De Vere seated there.

"Good heavens, Charles! what is the matter?" she inquired, springing up from her chair, her countenance as pale as death and her whole form quivering.

"That woman, mother," cried her son,— "that woman——"

"Yes, yes, Charles! For God's sake speak!"—and Mrs. De Vere tottered to her chair, on which she sank down.

"That woman is—is—murdered!" rejoined the youth, who in the violence of his own excitement did not notice how tremendously Mrs. De Vere was excited also.

"Murdered!" she said. "Is this possible?"

"Yes—murdered!" exclaimed Charles: "and I fear by that very young girl whom we saw disputing with her. Oh, it was a dreadful spectacle!—the bare recollection of it——"

"Sit down, Charles—and compose yourself. Here! take a glass of water!" and his mother was now all alacrity to give him the refreshment.

Charles drank at a draught the contents of the tumbler; and then he proceeded, in hurried and broken sentences, to explain to his mother all that had occurred. He told her how his intervention had been rejected by the young milliner—how he had gone in search of his mother—how, on not finding her at the cottage, he had sped off again in another direction—how he had thus found his way back to the spot where the altercation between the two females had taken place—and how he had discovered the lifeless form of the hag, with the policemen bending over it. As he progressed in his narrative, he grew somewhat more calm; and it was in a more collected manner, too, that he recapitulated everything which had taken place between himself and the constables. Mrs. De Vere listened with an expression of fearful interest upon her countenance; and she occasionally interrupted the earlier part of the narrative by questions in respect to what the old woman had said when Charles had offered Miss Barrington his protection?

"It is a dreadful occurrence," she observed, when the whole story was complete. "To think that a young girl—such as you have described this Miss Barrington to be, and such as she struck me from the hasty glimpse which I obtained of her——"

"Oh, shocking indeed!" ejaculated young De Vere. "But how was it that I missed you, mother?"

"I can scarcely tell," she answered. "I must have gone one way while you took another. Ah!

and then I recollect I struck across the fields— But there is one thing, Charles—one thing which I should rejoin. It is that when you appear before the Coroner—or elsewhere—to give your evidence—it will be unnecessary, you know, my dear boy—quite unnecessary indeed,—for it can have nothing to do with the testimony—”

“What do you mean, my dear mother?” inquired Charles, almost impatiently; for Mrs. De Vere was hesitating, stammering, and faltering.

“I mean, Charles,” she continued, “it will be altogether unnecessary to state that the unfortunate woman ever hung about our residence—”

“Ah, my dear mother!” exclaimed the youth, “I wish in the name of God you would tell me wherefore that woman haunted and persecuted you—why you were afraid of her—and why you gave utterance to those bitter, bitter words which met my ears when I returned home this afternoon?”

“Did either of the policemen seem to know who the woman was?” asked Mrs. De Vere, with a strange look.

“No: they said nothing upon the subject,” replied Charles. “I do not think they had the slightest notion who she was. But I was so bewildered and dismayed—so shocked and horrified—”

“It was natural, my dear boy,” said Mrs. De Vere. “But in reference to the questions you just now put to me, I must tell you—as I have told you before—that I knew this Mrs. Chicklade in other times, when she passed as a respectable woman in society. She fell into very wicked paths; she became a vile abandoned creature—so infamous indeed that she was utterly cast off by all her acquaintances, who, like myself, had been deceived in her. You may suppose therefore, my dear Charles, that it was not a very pleasant thing for me to find such a bad woman suddenly presenting herself,—haunting me—making drains upon my purse—”

“But why, mother, in the name of heaven did you submit to all this?” exclaimed Charles, bewildered and frightened at what he heard.

“Can you suppose—you, my own son—can you suppose, I ask,” said Mrs. De Vere, with an air as if she were half shocked, half indignant, “that the woman exercised any legitimate or well-grounded power over me? But do you not know how brittle is our reputation in this world, and how the surface of the purest mirror may be dimmed with the foulest breath? Suppose, for instance, that a notorious villain, cheat, and swindler presented himself to claim a renewal of an acquaintance with you, on the ground that you had once been intimate at a period when you knew not his real character; and suppose that in the desperation of his circumstances he threatened to malign and calumniate you if you yielded not to his extortionate demands,—would you not dread lest your reputation should catch an infection from such a source, from the simple fact of its being proclaimed that friendship and intimacy did really once exist between you? You, however, as a man might have the moral courage to spurn the wretch and bid him do his worst. But with a woman, Charles, it is different!—and when the woman too is a mother, think you that she would not tremble if an infamous creature, capable of any wickedness,

threatened to parade a tissue of the most shocking misrepresentations—falsehoods—lies—diabolical inventions, before her own son?”

“Enough, dear mother!” ejaculated Charles: “I comprehend how cruelly you have been tortured—how vilely and unjustly persecuted by this unprincipled creature! Oh, I was wrong to press you for explanations! I now feel that a son ought never to compel a parent to enter upon self-vindication when he knows that this parent of his is virtue itself! Ah, my dear mother! does it not look like heaven’s own retribution that the evil-doing woman should have thus met her death in the neighbourhood where she sought to do so much mischief?”

“It does seem so, Charles!” answered Mrs. De Vere solemnly.

We must now take a temporary leave of the mother and son at Belmont Cottage, and shift the scene of our narrative, although to no very great distance. It will be remembered that in the middle part of this memorable day of which we are writing—or to be more particular as to the hour, it was at two o’clock, that Mr. Timperley issued from Belmont Cottage, having previously ascertained from Mrs. De Vere where Sir John Dalham’s suburban villa was situated. We did not choose at the time to interrupt the continuous narrative of all those meetings and incidents which related to Mrs. Chicklade, by following Mr. Timperley: but we must now return to him.

Sir John Dalham’s villa was situated at a distance of about a mile from Belmont Cottage. It was not a spacious dwelling; for Sir John was a widower, having only one son—and thus his establishment, in a family sense, was exceedingly limited. But on the other hand he maintained many domestics both at his villa and at his town-mansion. He had horses and equipages at both. If therefore the suburban residence were not very spacious so far as the main building was concerned, it had numerous outhouses, together with some ten or a dozen acres of paddock and garden-grounds. It was to this place that Mr. Timperley bent his way on foot; and he was speedily admitted into the Baronet’s presence. Sir John was a man far advanced in life: indeed he had already passed his seventieth year; and to look at him, one would have marvelled that he could have attained such an age. He was shrivelled and withered—attenuated almost to a skeleton—with a repulsive cadaverousness of countenance. Yet the small keen grey eyes had a wondrous vitality in them: they were eyes which appeared capable of looking a person through and through, and penetrating into the most secret recesses of the soul. Hard deep lines, traced by strong passions, blended with the wrinkles which were impressed by age; and it would soon be found by any one coming in contact with Sir John Dalham for the first time, that a powerful intellect maintained its fire in what might at the first glance seem to be the form of a shrivelled mummy.

Mr. Timperley was ushered into a moderate-sized but sumptuously furnished room, where the Baronet, wrapped in a French flowered silk dressing-gown, and with a black velvet skull-cap ornamented with a gold tassel, was seated at a table on which luncheon had just been served up. All kinds of delicacies that could possibly tempt a

jaded appetite, appeared upon that board: there was a numerous assortment of exquisite wines and *liqueurs*; and a stout, well-fed lacquey, in gorgeous livery and with powdered hair, stood behind the old Baronet's chair.

"Ah, Mr. Timperley!" said Sir John Dalham the moment the solicitor was announced: "you are welcome. Pray walk in. Give Mr. Timperley a chair—and then leave us," he added, turning to his domestic.

"Being up in this neighbourhood, Sir John, on some little business," said Mr. Timperley, when he and the Baronet were alone together, "I thought I would just drop in upon you. I called in Berkeley Square last evening, and was told that you were at St. John's Wood——"

"Yes," observed the Baronet, "I frequent this place as much as possible in the fine weather. But what tidings have you brought me?"

"Everything progresses, Sir John, as you could wish," replied Mr. Timperley, rubbing his hands and bending a significant look upon the Baronet. "I was there yesterday—I saw the old man——"

"Ah! and he doubtless still clings to hope?" cried the Baronet, with a chuckle which threw him into a violent fit of coughing that left him exhausted for three or four minutes afterwards, while his eyes looked horribly bleared and blood-shot.

Mr. Timperley did not however seem to take the slightest notice of this incident: but with his double eye-glasses he appeared to be absorbed in the contemplation of a very fine picture, though not of a very decent subject, that was suspended to the wall opposite to where he sat. For the lawyer knew Sir John Dalham well, and was aware that nothing annoyed him so much as to take notice of his ailments or infirmities.

"Well—and so you were with the old man yesterday?" said Sir John, at length regaining some of the breath which the violent fit of coughing had well-nigh utterly expelled from his attenuated frame. "And how does he look? He does not wear as well as I do, I'll be bound?" added the Baronet, with a most malignant expression of countenance.

Mr. Timperley might have said that if he were an actuary in a Life-office he would infinitely rather grant an assurance on behalf of Mr. Barrington than on that of Sir John Dalham: but it did not suit the lawyer's purpose to tell the truth where he knew it would be unpalatable. He therefore exclaimed, "How does he look? Like a corpse, Sir John! It is impossible he can last much longer."

"But you are keeping up the old game, my dear Mr. Timperley?" said the Baronet eagerly and anxiously. "You are——"

"Doing everything in your interest, as in duty bound," replied the solicitor, with a low deferential bow, as if to a patron whom it suited him full well to serve. "The old man is full of hope for the next Term—always the next Term, you know, Sir John!"—and here Mr. Timperley chuckled with a subdued delight as if making himself merry at the expense of his unfortunate client the prisoner in Whitecross Street.

"Is! ha!" also chuckled Sir John: "the next Term—eh? Well, and of course you encourage

that hope? You tell him his case is a good one?"

"And then I draw up his pleas and affidavits," rejoined Timperley, "in a way that makes it a very bad one."

"To be sure! to be sure!" said Sir John, rubbing his hands. "Keep the old villain in gaol!—keep him out of his just rights! I am not to be beggared for him. But what about the compromise, Mr. Timperley?"

"I touched him upon that ground," answered the lawyer: "but as I feared and anticipated, he was inaccessible. As delicately as I could—and yet with a certain degree of firmness, as if exercising the authority of an attorney towards his client—I suggested that were he to offer to accept one-third——"

"Yes, yes—I would give that," interjected Sir John Dalham, "to avoid any farther risk—although you, my dear Mr. Timperley, have taken good care that the case shall hang on so long. But what said he in respect to the compromise?"

"He would perish sooner—or something to that effect," rejoined Timperley. "I appealed to him for the sake of his grandchildren: but it was of no avail—the old man is as obstinate as he can be. Ah! by the bye, Sir John, there was one thing which rather alarmed me——"

"Eh? eh? what is that?" inquired the Baronet, who in the sudden nervousness which seized upon him, spilt half the contents of the wine-glass which he was conveying to his lips.

"Barrington actually threatened to take his business out of my hands," responded Timperley, "and entrust it to another solicitor. He fancied that he saw some hesitation in my conduct——"

"But he does not suspect you?" cried Sir John: "he does not think that you are playing him false?"

"No," answered Timperley: "we parted very good friends—and I promised to send him the new affidavits in the course of a few days. My only fear is that the greater his experience in studying all these law-matters, the more probable it is that he will detect the points which I purposely leave open for your counsel to seize upon as the ground of demanding a postponement of the final judgment and for moving to put in fresh affidavits."

"Don't be afraid, my dear Mr. Timperley," said Sir John Dalham, though he himself was still nervous and quivering: "trust to your own ingenuity. It has never failed you yet; and besides, I am always ready and willing, you know, to sharpen its edge with something of this sort."

Thus speaking, the Baronet drew forth a number of bank-notes, which he handed to Timperley, who received them with a low bow.

"It is a pity—a very great pity," continued Sir John, "that the old man cannot be starved into a surrender. We anticipated great things, you know, when you withdrew the guinea a week——"

"Yes—but it was impossible to foresee that this girl Winifred, his grandchild," interjected Timperley, "would be enabled to supply him with funds. For my part I can't make it out. From all I learn, the girl is virtuous; and yet it is impossible that by the exercise of her needle she can maintain the old man and herself as respectably as she does. She must have some friends—or else she must be the mistress of some person who sup-

plies her purse. Yet if so, she is consummately skillful in the art of hypocrisy."

"I wish we could find out, Mr. Timperley," said Sir John. "It would be a fine card for us to play, if we could by any means deprive the girl of her resources. The old man would in that case be speedily starved into a surrender: and instead of offering him a third, we could make him content himself with a sixth, or even a tenth portion of all he claims."

"I will think how it is to be managed," answered Mr. Timperley. "Rest assured, Sir John, that whatsoever I can do to meet your views or forward your interests, shall be done! And now I will take my departure."

"Stop!—one word!" ejaculated the old Baronet. "Do you ever happen to meet my son?"

"Very, very rarely," answered the solicitor. "We merely bow and pass——"

"To be sure! that's right!" interrupted the Baronet. "I would not for the world he should suspect anything of what is going on betwixt you and me. Roderick is a strange fellow, you know, Mr. Timperley: I have told you so before. He already entertains a strong opinion about this case: he considers that Barrington is ill-treated—and if he once knew how excellent an understanding subsists between you and me——"

"But he does not know it—and he must not know it!" said the lawyer emphatically. "Never from my lips shall a syllable drop——"

"Heaven knows none shall ever fall from mine!" exclaimed Sir John. "I shall outlive that old villain Barrington yet; and in one way or another I shall conquer ere I die. But if, Mr. Timperley, by one of those casualties which do sometimes cut short men who might naturally hope to live many years,—if, I say, a premature death should overtake me, that son of mine would make a perfect fool of himself in respect to this lawsuit—he will be for giving up everything to the Barringtons—he will leave himself a perfect beggar—he will inherit a title without a shilling to maintain it! You see, Mr. Timperley, that all these reflections are very painful indeed; and there are times when, I assure you, I am driven to my wife's ends."

"But Mr. Dalham has never entered so deeply into the merits of the suit," observed Timperley, "as to be aware of the real excellence of Barrington's claim, or to suspect the chicaneries by means of which you have been so long fencing it off? At least, my dear Sir John, I think that such is the assurance you have often given me?"

"It is a long time Mr. Timperley, since you and I happened to speak on that particular subject," rejoined the Baronet. "Several times I have been on the point of telling you, when something has always transpired to prevent it, that within the last two or three years—I do not exactly recollect how long—Roderick has seemed to take a greater interest in this suit; he has made more inquiries—he has looked deeper into it—he has been to my solicitors—in short, I don't know how it is, but it was only a little while ago he was suggesting that if I and Barrington agreed to halve the whole property——"

"And you, Sir John, of course scorned the idea?" exclaimed Mr. Timperley.

"Aye—and more than that," continued the

Baronet, with a decidedly malignant expression of countenance, "I vowed that I would invoke the bitterest curses on Roderick's head if he ever dared again plead before me on behalf of those Barringtons. I took the most deadly oath that I would cover him with my maledictions if he ventured to seek them, speak to them, or succour them in any way. More than once have I spoken in these terms to Roderick within the last two or three years; and he has been touched by my words—for he has always been accustomed to regard me with respect. You know, my dear Mr. Timperley, how wild he was wont to be—how he used to plunge headlong into debt—and how I invariably came forward to extricate him from his difficulties. Well, he is not ungrateful—he knows, between you and me, that if as a father I have not set him the most moral of examples, yet that at all events I have ever been a most indulgent parent."

"True, Sir John!" said the solicitor: "and rest assured that Mr. Dalham will continue to do his duty towards you while you live, and be faithful to your memory when you shall have gone hence."

"Nevertheless," exclaimed the Baronet, "let us leave nothing to posthumous chances; but let us do all we can either to break old Barrington's heart, or else to starve him into a surrender with the least possible delay. Perhaps one of these aims may be accomplished through the medium of his grand daughter? At all events you will see—you must make inquiries about her—you must not let the grass grow under your feet."

"Trust to me, Sir John," replied Timperley; and he then took his leave of the old Baronet.

On issuing forth from the grounds attached to the villa, the solicitor was wending his way through the fields, when he beheld the subject of the concluding part of his discourse with the Baronet approaching from a little distance. This was Mr. Dalham. He was walking slowly, and in a thoughtful mood, with his eyes bent downward. Timperley saw that he was as yet unnoticed by that gentleman; and not caring to fall in with him, he at once struck off behind a hedge which concealed him from Mr. Dalham's view. He thus escaped an encounter with the Baronet's son.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ACCUSATION.

WE must now direct the attention of the reader to a couple of decently-furnished rooms on the second floor of a respectable house in Aldersgate Street. This street, we may observe for the benefit of those readers who may not happen to be well acquainted with the metropolis, is in the close vicinity of Whitecross Street Prison. The two rooms to which we have alluded, constituted the lodging of Winifred Barrington.

It was at about half-past four o'clock in the afternoon of the day of which we are writing, that Winifred returned to her abode, with her bonnet and bundle. She had ridden from Camden Town in an omnibus, to the nearest point where the vehicle could deposit her; and she had thence hurriedly walked homeward. On knocking at the door, admission was at once given her

by the landlady—a middle-aged good-natured matron, who had conceived a great friendship for the grand-daughter of the unfortunate old prisoner in Whitecross Street. Mrs. Slater—for that was the landlady's name—possessed a little annuity of some twenty or thirty pounds a year, from one of the City Guilds to which her husband had belonged; and she converted her humble means into a competency by letting portions of her house in ready-furnished lodgings. Being a thoroughly respectable woman, she was very particular whom she thus harboured; and consequently, during her sojourn there, Winifred had never fallen in with any improper acquaintances. The rooms which she occupied were small: but Winifred, with a view to economy, would long ago have given up one and contented herself with a single apartment, had not Mrs. Slater insisted upon her young favourite retaining them both at a reduced rent.

On opening the door for her on the present occasion—the maid-servant being out at the time—Mrs. Slater was at once struck by Winifred's appearance. She looked exceedingly agitated: there was something strange altogether in her aspect; and the worthy dame was seized with the apprehension that some new calamity had overtaken the prisoner in Whitecross Street.

"I hope there is nothing wrong, Miss?" she said; for knowing that Winifred was a lady by birth as well as by education and by manners, she always treated her with respect.

"No—nothing," answered the damsel: and with her box in one hand and her bundle in the other, she passed hastily by Mrs. Slater, in a few moments disappearing up the staircase.

"Something *has* however happened to the poor girl, I am convinced of it!" said the worthy woman to herself, as she closed the door and slowly retired to her own parlour. "I have often seen her look unhappy: but she never seemed so strange as she is this afternoon. What can it possibly mean? I would go up and renew my inquiries—only I am afraid of being thought intrusive."

Having brought her musings to this point, Mrs. Slater presently sat down to her tea-table; and as she lingered over her little repast, she continued to reflect on the agitated and excited looks of her favourite lodger, until she gradually sank into a doze.

It was about an hour later that the landlady was startled by a loud imperious knock at the front door; and when the maid-servant had answered the summons, Mrs. Slater heard the sounds of two men's heavy footsteps in the passage. Then her ear caught the words, "Want Miss Barrington?" which were ejaculated in accents of mingled consternation and affright by the domestic.

"Yes—Miss Barrington. You say she lives here?" answered a rough commanding voice. "Which floor?"

"The second," responded the maid-servant. "But good gracious! is it possible—"

"Hold your tongue, and don't be foolish," interrupted the same rough voice that had before spoken: and then the heavy footsteps of the two men began hastily to ascend the stairs.

These were two police officials. Immediately

after the corpse of Mrs. Chicklade was borne from the scene of the tragedy to the nearest public-house, the police had instituted inquiries in the neighbourhood; and they had quickly learnt that a young seamstress, with handbox and bundle, had been seen to call at Sidney Villa. Thither one of the policemen bent his way; and without previously explaining his object, he elicited from Rachel Miss Barrington's address. He then hurriedly stated for what purpose he required it: but he tarried not to hear the indignant exclamations of the worthy woman against the possibility of Winifred being the authoress of so frightful a deed. We will here pause only for a single instant to state that the report of the murder diffused throughout Sidney Villa the same horror and dismay which were already experienced in the neighbourhood wherever the tale was known: but Agnes experienced even stronger feelings still; for she was alike afflicted and indignant at the thought that so amiable a creature as Winifred could have been deemed guilty of such a crime.

The reader has however no difficulty in now comprehending the purport of the ominous visit paid by the two police-officials to Mrs. Slater's house. They ascended to the second floor: they opened the first door which presented itself, observing no ceremony in the process; and Winifred started up from her seat on thus beholding them.

"Ah! you know what we come for," said one of the constables, laying his hand upon the girl's shoulder. "We want you for the murder of the old woman."

It would be impossible to describe the strange horrified look which Miss Barrington bent upon the police-officer: her countenance became ghastly—something appeared to waver upon her lips—but it was inarticulate: and then with a scream she sank upon a chair.

"And, by Jove, here's the ring!" exclaimed the other police-official, snatching up the jewel from the table where it lay. "A ruby in the middle—with four pearls set round it! The very same!"

"Great God! I am innocent!" cried Winifred, throwing herself upon her knees and wildly clasping her hands. "I take heaven to witness that I am innocent! Give me that ring! I conjure you not to take it from me! Oh, you know not what it has cost me to obtain it!"

"Ah, but we *do* know," rejoined one of the officials "and that's what we are here for. Come, get up, my girl: this gammon won't do for us! You must come along to the station."

The officer who thus spoke, raised Winifred by force from her suppliant posture; and the unfortunate girl gazed upon him with the vacancy of an idiot. She seemed as if her senses had completely broken down beneath the weight of this stupendous calamity. Thus she stood for a few moments: then, as if suddenly smitten with the consciousness of her position, she gave vent to another wild scream,—again clasped her hands in a paroxysm of indescribable agony—and sank back in the chair.

"Come, young woman," said one of the officials, taking up her bonnet and shawl: "if you don't choose to move of your own accord, we must carry you by main force—that's all."



"Where? To prison? O God! my poor grandfather!"—and with another wild cry she sank senseless on the floor.

The constables conveyed her down the stairs: an empty cab was passing the house at the moment: it was stopped—and Winifred, still in a lifeless condition, was placed in it. Fortunate for her was it that she was thus deprived of consciousness at the time; for the rumour had spread that two constables had entered the house to arrest somebody, and a crowd had begun to collect. The cab drove rapidly away—but not before one of the officers had hurriedly whispered to a friend whom he recognised amidst the group, the cause for which their prisoner was arrested.

Mrs. Slater, on learning from her maid-servant that the two men whose heavy footsteps she had heard were police-constables, had felt assured that they must be labouring under some strange mistake in seeking Miss Barrington—until she sud-

denly recollected the young lady's agitated appearance on returning home after an absence of some hours. Full of anxious curiosity, she stole up the stairs to listen: but when she heard that it was nothing less than so awful charge of murder which was made against her favourite lodger, the worthy dame was seized with such a fearful consternation—such an overwhelming bewilderment—that how she found her way down-stairs again, she never afterwards could remember. She only just succeeded in gaining the interior of her parlour, when she sank down in a swoon—to the increased affright of the already alarmed and dismayed servant-girl.

The domestic did not however entirely lose her presence of mind: but she instantaneously began to administer restoratives to her mistress; and in this process she was altogether unassisted—for the other lodgers who in addition to Winifred occupied rooms beneath that roof, were all out at the time.

After awhile Mrs. Slater was brought back to consciousness; and she then burst into tears as well as lamentations.

"Oh Mary!" she said, wringing her hands, "I can't believe it's true! What! Miss Winifred—No! I can't breathe the word! I should as soon think that I myself was capable of such a crime! And yet her strange looks? Well, well! I don't know what to think of it! But the disgrace that, whether or no, will be brought on this house that's always been so quiet and respectable!"

"Oh, ma'am!" cried the servant-girl, weeping; "it will be enough to kill her poor old grandfather—at his age—and suffering so much as he has done for so long a time!"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Slater, her natural goodness of heart triumphing over that temporary display of selfishness in regard to whatsoever taint might be thrown upon the respectability of her house; "you remind me of a duty that I really ought to perform! It would be shocking if the intelligence is conveyed rudely and abruptly to that poor old man. Even if his grandchild is guilty, it is no reason why he should suffer on her account: but if she should be innocent, it is all the more incumbent on me to do that which she cannot now do for herself—I mean to comfort or console the poor gentleman."

The maid-servant heartily approved of Mrs. Slater's decision; and she rushed up-stairs to fetch the worthy woman's bonnet and shawl. Meanwhile Mrs. Slater took her market-basket; and she deposited therein a bottle of wine—a seed cake, which she had made as a little regalement for herself—a couple of pots of jam, and two or three other little delicacies. A few minutes afterwards she was weeding her way in the direction of the prison. She was met by one or two of her neighbours, who questioned her in respect to the horrible report concerning Winnie Barrington which was circulating in the district; but Mrs. Slater—though heartily fond of a gossip, which is a little weakness characteristic of all lodging-house-keepers—would not pause to do more than emphatically express her conviction that her favourite lodger must be innocent of the dread crime imputed to her. In a few minutes she reached the prison; and after the exchange of some commonplace observations with the turnkey, she discovered to her satisfaction that she had outstripped the rumour so far as that establishment was concerned.

But it was now too late for any visitor to be admitted within the walls, unless under very peculiar circumstances indeed; and the turnkey offered to convey the basket to Mr. Barrington. But Mrs. Slater whisperingly explained to him the melancholy purpose for which she had come; and the man was horrified and astonished at what he heard.

"No, no!" he said, "I never will believe it! What! Miss Winnie that I have known ever since she was a child, to go for to do such a thing as that! I'd just as soon fancy I could eat my own head as that she is guilty. But it will be a sad blow all the same for the poor old gentleman; and it's werry kind of you, Mrs. Slater, to come to break it tenderly to him. You shall see him in this room off the lobby here. Just walk in and sit down for a minute or two till he comes."

The worthy woman accordingly passed into the room indicated by the friendly turnkey; and she had not been long there when Mr. Barrington made his appearance. He knew Mrs. Slater well; for she had sometimes accompanied Winifred to see him on a Sunday—and she had occasionally called alone at the prison to convey him some little present on her own account. Thus the old man was by no means surprised to find her there; and he entertained not the slightest apprehension that anything was wrong.

"Ah, my good friend," he said, shaking her heartily by the hand: "you do not neglect the poor old prisoner. But the time is not far distant now when I shall have it in my power to show you my gratitude. The next Term *must* see the end of my business; and then I shall be rich, Mrs. Slater——"

"Ah, my dear sir!" interjected the good woman, shaking her head mournfully, and with difficulty keeping back her tears; "but riches don't always constitute happiness. There's many and many a drawback——"

"Yes—but my drawback has lasted for a quarter of a century!" exclaimed the old man; "and therefore it must have an end."

"God alone, sir, can decide that!" said Mrs. Slater, with a look which she meant to be ominously significant, so as to prepare the prisoner for the terrific announcement which she had to make.

"Yes—God decides everything," responded Mr. Barrington. "But God is just—and he does not for ever heap misfortunes upon the heads of those who have not merited them."

"Oh, pray my dear sir, for heaven's sake talk not thus!" ejaculated Mrs. Slater, to whom the old man's words seemed, under existing circumstances, to savour almost of blasphemy.

"Well, well," he said, "it is perhaps wrong to mix up holy names with our worldly affairs: but as I was telling you, Mrs. Slater, the day is not far distant—only next Term—when I shall be rich—and my dear Winnie will be rich—and she shall ride in her carriage—and she shall wear beautiful jewels——"

"Oh, Mr. Barrington!"—and the worthy woman was now weeping bitterly and sobbing convulsively.

"Good God! what is the matter?" exclaimed the old man, now suddenly seized with alarm. "Has anything happened to my dear Winnie? is she ill? You have sent for a doctor—have you not?"

"Oh! how can I ever tell you what has occurred?" gasped and faltered the kind-hearted woman; for she was profoundly affected. "But I am sure she is innocent, sir! Oh, I am confident she is!"

"Innocent?" echoed the old man with a bewildered gaze. "Innocent?" he repeated. "Why, she is goodness itself! Innocent?"

"Yes, I am sure she is!" cried Mrs. Slater, vehemently; "and I should have told the police-officers so if I had not swooned away!"

"Police-officers?" echoed the old man, now trembling violently. "What on earth do you mean? Who has dared say anything against my dear little Winnie? Ah! I see something dreadful has happened!"

"Something dreadful, indeed, Mr. Barrington!" exclaimed Mrs. Slater. "For God's sake prepare yourself! The blow will be terrible!"

"Oh, what do you mean?"—and the poor old man was now quivering nervously from head to foot: and he was looking into Mrs. Slater's countenance with the most poignant anxiety as if to fathom the truth. "Could poor Winnie have done anything wrong? Perhaps disappointed in receiving money due to her—fearful that I might want—and so—and so—she may have taken something that did not properly belong to her at the time—but she meant to pay for it at a future day—"

"Oh, Mr. Barrington! it is much worse than this!" faltered Mrs. Slater, again sobbing violently. "I mean that the charge which is made against her is much worse—for I know that she is innocent—Oh, I am sure she is!"

"Good God! what is it?"—and the old man trembled like an aspen leaf. "Tell me! tell me!"

"Some woman—but pray compose yourself—some woman has been—now don't shake and tremble like this—she may not be dead after all, you know—she might only have been very seriously hurt—though at first they thought she was killed—and some how or another poor Miss Winnie has been suspected—arrested—But—"

"Impossible!" exclaimed the old man, his bowed form suddenly becoming as upright as if he was in his prime. "My Winnie a murderess? No, no! I would sooner believe anything than this! You are mad!—you are labouring under some horrible delusion!"

"Oh, Mr. Barrington! it is not I who am mad—it is the wicked people who have accused poor Miss Winnie—!" and Mrs. Slater could not give utterance to another syllable; her voice was choked in an agony of weeping.

"My God! my God!" moaned the wretched old man, now sinking upon a seat and clasping his hands in anguish. "I do indeed see that something terrible has happened!"

For some minutes he rocked himself to and fro, gazing stedfastly upon vacancy—giving utterance to no sound, not even so much as a moan: and Mrs. Slater, wiping away her tears, looked at him with apprehension—for she thought that his senses were abandoning him.

"Where is my Winnie?" he suddenly exclaimed, starting up from his seat, "I will go to her! For many a long year she has comforted me: I will now go and comfort her! The poor girl! I think I see that sweet face of her's looking mournful—Oh, so mournful!—and those beautiful eyes filled with tears! Good God! I cannot endure it! My darling, darling Winnie—I come to thee!"

The old man strode towards the door: but Mrs. Slater, now again weeping bitterly, caught him by the arm, exclaiming, "For heaven's sake be tranquil, Mr. Barrington! You know you cannot go out! I will do everything I can for your poor Winnie! But you—you are a prisoner!"

"Just God, it is true!" ejaculated the old man: and he staggered back to his seat. "It is like a frightful dream!—it is as a death-blow! Winnie, Winnie, where art thou? You in one prison—

I in another! O heaven, it is enough to drive one mad!"

Then the old man began to weep—again rocking himself to and fro; and Mrs. Slater regarded him with illimitable compassion. All that selfishness of old age which had so long rendered him indifferent to the amount of work that his grandchild might have to toil through in order to support herself and him, was now melted and absorbed in the strength of the tenderness which he veritably experienced towards her. It would be impossible to conceive a more heartrending spectacle than that of the old man's grief, as it was now presented to the view of the worthy lodging-house keeper.

"If they have taken my Winnie from me," he said, in the whimpering tremulous tone of childish old age, "they have taken the only prop that sustained me. Her cousin is far away across the sea—she has but me to look to—and I cannot go to her! She cannot come to me! Bars and bolts to keep her secure!—bars and bolts to keep me secure! Oh, the wretches! to have taken away the old man's darling!"

And now the unfortunate prisoner's grief became so violent that Mrs. Slater was seriously alarmed. She endeavoured to breathe soothing words in his ear: but he repulsed her.

"No, no! I will go to her!" he cried, again suddenly starting up from his seat. "Nobody shall keep me back!—nothing shall restrain me!"

Again too did Mrs. Slater catch him by the arm,—reminding him, though with all possible delicacy, that he was a prisoner. He stopped short—he gazed upon her with a wild vacant stare—her alarm increased—she thought that he was going mad—when all of a sudden he gave vent to a hollow groan and sank down senseless upon the floor.

Mrs. Slater summoned the turnkeys; and the unfortunate old man was borne up to the infirmary of the prison,—the officials assuring the worthy woman that every attention should be shown him.

On issuing forth from the gaol, with a sad tightening at the heart, Mrs. Slater remembered her pledge to do all she could for Winnie; and having made inquiries respecting the particular station-house to which it was most probable the unfortunate girl had been conveyed, she took a cab and proceeded thither. The officials could not however permit the interview which the worthy woman so much desired to have with her: but they assured Mrs. Slater that as much attention had been shown her as circumstances would permit.

"And do you really think she is guilty, sir?" inquired the lodging-house-keeper of the Inspector into whose presence she had been ushered.

"I cannot give an opinion, ma'am," was his guarded reply. "We shall know more about it to-morrow when the magistrate has taken the business in hand."

"Ah! I feared there was something wrong!" said Mrs. Slater, thus inconsiderately giving audible expression to her painful musings. "It struck me like a presentiment of evil when I opened the door for the poor girl and saw how strange and agitated she looked—"

"Indeed?" said the Inspector, catching at these words. "And pray what time was this?"

Mrs. Slater was now suddenly shocked by the conviction that she had been unconsciously betrayed into a statement which might set most prejudicially to the very being in whose welfare she was so deeply interested. She felt as if she had committed a crime: she could have torn out her tongue by the roots.

"Your evidence is important," said the Inspector; "and you must have the goodness to attend to-morrow morning at the police-court. Be so kind as not to fail; or else—I mean no offence, me'am—the magistrate will issue his warrant to compel you to come forward."

"Oh, what have I done?" murmured the unhappy woman, sinking upon a seat, where for some minutes she remained in the most painful meditation.

At length she became aware that she was the object of curiosity on the part of three or four persons who were lounging in the station-house; and rising from her seat, she collected her thoughts sufficiently to address the Inspector again.

"Would you have the goodness to convey a message to the unfortunate girl?" she said, in a voice tremulous with emotion. "It will be a great kindness and a real act of mercy. Tell her that her friend Mrs. Slater has broken the intelligence to her poor old grandfather, who has borne the blow—as well as—as—could be expected."

The Inspector promised to fulfil the worthy woman's wish; and the latter then took her departure, saying to herself, "It was better I should send in that little falsehood about her poor grandfather to the unhappy Winnie, than to have either left her in suspense or to have suffered her to learn the exact truth."

But as she retraced her way homeward in the cab, Mrs. Slater bitterly repented the unguarded expressions she had let fall from her lips—while she trembled at the idea of having to attend at the police-office on the morrow.

But in the meanwhile what of Winifred herself? She had awakened from a state of unconsciousness to find herself in a cab with a couple of police-officials, on her way to the station-house. At first it all appeared to her like a frightful dream—until her thoughts being collected, she could no longer shut out from herself the conviction of its reality. Then she again and again protested her innocence in the most passionate terms—until she found from the answers of the constables that it was useless to appeal to them. To the Inspector at the station-house she renewed her protestations, with the hope that he had the power to adjudicate in the case. But here again she was bitterly disappointed; and she was consigned to the care of the female searcher—for it was feared in the dreadful excitement of her feelings that she might lay violent hands upon herself. She thus at all events escaped the discomfort of being locked up in one of the ordinary cells—though it was now all the same to the wretched Winifred into what den she was thrust: for personal comfort was as the most miserable of trifles in comparison with the awful position in which she found herself placed.

The reader will scarcely require to be informed that the unhappy girl thought with poignant anguish of her poor old grandfather; and she was

well nigh driven to distraction with the idea that if the intelligence should reach him abruptly, it would be sufficient to strike him dead upon the spot. But after awhile her frightful apprehensions on this point were destined to experience a material relief, when the Inspector delivered Mrs. Slater's message. Winifred—not suspecting for a single instant that the worthy woman had for the best of purposes misrepresented the actual truth—was comforted by the assurance thus conveyed to her; and clasping her hands in grateful fervour, she prayed for some time in silence.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EXAMINATION.

EVERY dweller in the metropolis knows what a sensation is created and how much morbid curiosity is excited, when the intelligence begins to spread of a barbarous murder having been committed within its precincts. Second editions of the evening newspapers were published, in the present instance, with an account of as much as the penny-a-lining purveyors for the press had been enabled to pick up: but the morning journals of the ensuing day contained ampler details. Mrs. Chicklade's body had been identified; and it will perhaps be as well if we were to lay before our readers the following extract on this point from one of those daily prints last alluded to.

The passage ran thus:—"It seems that the unfortunate victim of this barbarous, and in some sense mysterious crime, is a woman of the name of Dorothy Chicklade. Her age appears to have been about sixty; and she had recently occupied a somewhat expensive lodging in a house, which is however of questionable repute, in Norton Street, Fitzroy Square. It was the landlady of this house, who, reading the account in one of the evening papers, proceeded to the tavern where the corpse lies, and at once identified it. It is but decent to refrain as much as possible from speaking to the prejudice of the dead: but truth compels us to state that the antecedents of the unfortunate victim of this tragedy will not bear too close a scrutiny. The young person against whom the heavy weight of suspicion presses, has hitherto borne an exemplary character—though it is now difficult to reconcile the belief of her virtue with her connexion with such a woman as the deceased. In justice however to Winifred Barrington, it must be remarked that she has for some time aided materially to the support of an old grandfather who has been for many years an inmate of one of the debtors' prisons of the metropolis, and who is the plaintiff in the long pending and well known Chancery suit of *'Barrington versus Dalham.'* We understand that Mr. Timperley, the eminent solicitor of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and who is Mr. Barrington's attorney in that suit, has generously undertaken to conduct the defence of his client's granddaughter. At a late hour last night Mr. Timperley had an interview with the prisoner: but we believe we are correct in asserting that beyond a general protestation of her innocence she declined making any statements."

Long before the usual hour at which the magistrate of the district police-office was accustomed to take his seat, a crowd collected in the neighbourhood to obtain a glimpse of the prisoner on her arrival. In anticipation of this display of morbid curiosity, the unfortunate girl was not conveyed to the police-office in the prison-van: but just before the night cases were disposed of, she was brought thither in a cab, in the custody of the inspector and another officer. The cab drew up close to the magistrate's private door; and the wretched Winifred was hurried from the vehicle into the building, with an expedition that greatly disappointed the bulk of the assembled crowd. The glimpse which however was obtained of her countenance by a few persons who were nearest to the officers that kept the way clear, showed them that Winifred was deadly pale, but that her features were rigid—either through utter despair, or else through the firmness of an unnatural hardihood—unless indeed it were with the inward consciousness of innocence: but that this last-mentioned solution was the correct one, few—very few imagined. All the circumstances of the case, so far as they had been disclosed by the newspapers, tended to fix the guilt unmistakably upon her; and though there were no demonstrations of ill-feeling on the part of the assembled multitude, yet the general impression was entirely against the prisoner.

It was not long after Winifred's arrival at the police-court that the magistrate signified his readiness to enter upon the case. The unhappy girl was now conducted into the court, and stationed in the dock. The place was thronged: but Winifred, after one quick glance flung around, looked neither to the right nor to the left, but kept her eyes bent downward for a long period. Those persons, however, who had obtained a view of the prisoner on her entrance—and those who were in a position to watch her countenance still—were struck with astonishment that a young person who had nothing forbidding or malicious in her looks, but on the contrary, everything prepossessing—could have perpetrated such a crime. Mr. Timperley, as the attorney who had engaged himself to conduct Winifred's defence, was already present in the court: the witnesses were in a private room, waiting to be summoned in due order.

In reply to the usual questions put by the Clerk of the Court, Winifred stated that she was nearly eighteen years of age—that she had latterly resided for some time at Mrs. Slater's in Aldergate Street—and that she was by avocation a seamstress. Her answers were given in a low and tremulous tone; and her countenance was now much less rigid in its expression than at the moment when she was so hurriedly conducted from the cab into the building.

Scarcely had the Clerk of the Court taken down Winifred's answers, when Mr. Wardour—an eminent barrister—made his appearance, in the becoming forensic costume of gown and wig. He took his seat in the place allotted to counsel; and bowing to the magistrate, said, "I am instructed, your worship, to appear on behalf of the prisoner, Winifred Barrington."

The unhappy girl herself took scarcely any notice of the circumstance; but Mr. Timperley appeared to be excited with astonishment and in-

dignation at the announcement made by Mr. Wardour.

"I am the attorney," he said, "for the defence: and as yet I have called upon no member of the bar to give his services in the matter. May I ask the learned gentleman by whom he is instructed?"

"It is sufficient for the magistrate to know that I am instructed," responded Mr. Wardour; "and the unfortunate prisoner perhaps best knows whether she possess any friend in the world who is likely to have thus far interested himself in her?"

Winifred started as if from a painful dream, on finding herself thus suddenly appealed to: but her ideas were quickly collected. She thought within herself that she had but two friends in the world who were at all likely to be caring for her at that moment; and these were her old grandfather and the gentleman whom she had met near Sidney Villa. Without precisely comprehending from Mr. Wardour's speech which of these two friends was the one who had retained him in her defence, she nevertheless knew that from either source the intention was good; and she said, after a very few moments' reflection, "I will thankfully accept the services of this gentleman."

At the same time she gently inclined her head towards Mr. Wardour; and Mr. Timperley, flinging upon her a strange glance, said, "Young woman, you know that I was influenced only by the most disinterested motives, and by a sense of duty towards your grandfather, whose attorney I am, in undertaking your defence."

Winifred made no answer: indeed she knew not what reply to give. She felt that friendship was at work from some quarter or another, and that she could not possibly do better than leave herself entirely in the hands of whomever it were that Mr. Wardour now represented.

"Giving you due credit, Mr. Timperley, for the best possible motives," said the magistrate, with a bland smile—for he was well acquainted with the lawyer, and frequently dined at his house—"it is clear that the prisoner has elected to be defended by Mr. Wardour; and therefore—"

"I understand your worship," interrupted Mr. Timperley, with a low bow; "I shall not interfere with the progress of the case: but I shall remain to watch it for the sake of the prisoner's afflicted old grandfather, whose attorney I have for many years been."

"Let it be thoroughly understood," said Mr. Wardour, "that I am far from intending any rudeness or disrespect towards Mr. Timperley, whom I know to be an eminent solicitor; and I am sure that on this point I am likewise expressing the feelings of him who has instructed me, through his solicitors, to appear on the prisoner's behalf. I would not improperly usurp Mr. Timperley's functions: and I am sure that every one will give him credit for the excellence of his motives in the task which he would have undertaken."

"The learned gentleman's explanation is perfectly satisfactory," responded Mr. Timperley.

These little amenities between barrister and lawyer having succeeded those remarks which at first threatened to engender a wrangle, the case was proceeded with.

The first witness who was called was the senior of the two policemen who had discovered the dead body. He commenced by stating that he was on duty in the immediate neighbourhood, when he was relieved by a comrade; and they walked a little way together, in conversation. At the bend in the lane they beheld a female form lying upon the grass which bordered the road; and they found that the woman was dead. The constable explained that a young gentleman, whose name was De Vere, almost immediately afterwards came up to the spot, and that in consequence of certain intelligence which he gave, he (the constable) followed up the clue which terminated in the arrest of the prisoner in the dock.

"I produce a ring," continued the police-officer, "which I found upon the table at the prisoner's lodging. This ring I have reason to believe belonged to the deceased. When I took it from the table, the prisoner was very much excited; and she exclaimed, 'You know not what it has cost me to obtain it!' or words to that effect."

"Did she protest her innocence of the crime imputed to her?" asked Mr. Wardour.

"She did," was the response.

"Perhaps she protested it vehemently?" asked the learned gentleman.

"Yes," replied the constable: "she was greatly excited. But we are too much accustomed to protestations of that sort—"

"Stop!" ejaculated Mr. Wardour: "this is not evidence—and you must not make such remarks."

The constable stood down from the witness-box; and his comrade who was with him at the time the murder was discovered, was next examined. His testimony was however merely corroborative of that given by the preceding witness.

"The lane is a very lonely one, I believe?" said Mr. Wardour.

"It is, sir," answered the constable.

"And thus," continued Mr. Wardour, "it was quite possible for any other person besides the prisoner in the dock to have passed that way, about the time the murder must have been committed, without being noticed by the constable upon that beat?"

"Quite possible, sir," answered the policeman.

He was now directed to stand down; and the Clerk of the Court inquired if Mr. Meadowbank, the surgeon who had examined the body, was in attendance. The reply was in the negative,—accompanied however with an assurance on the part of the Inspector that he would shortly be present.

"We will in the meanwhile put Mr. De Vere into the witness-box, your worship," added the Inspector.

Charles was accordingly now introduced; and as he entered the Court, Winifred recognised in him the young gentleman who had so kindly interfered in her behalf when she was disputing with the old woman. The unhappy girl was however too much agitated at the time—and her mind was now too much benumbed by the awful sense of her position—to be enabled to recollect with clearness every detail to which Charles De Vere might possibly depose. As for the young man himself, he looked pale and care-worn; and he forbore from glancing towards the prisoner—for his suspicions amounted almost to convictions

against her, and in the natural generosity of his heart he could not bear to think that one so young and of such prepossessing appearance had been capable of so foul a crime.

It was with clearness and precision that he gave his evidence—but yet with the unmistakable air of one who only came forward in the discharge of a melancholy duty. Winifred shivered to the very confines of her entire being when she discovered how damnable De Vere's testimony was against her. Step by step, as he proceeded, was an impulse given to her memory; and she now recalled to mind each successive detail which he specified. She knew that he was exaggerating nothing—misrepresenting nothing—that he was telling the exactest truth without swerving a hair's breadth on the side of augmentation or suppression. She perceived likewise that he told what he knew in the fewest possible words—so that he gave no false colour, either of a deepened or of a mitigated shade, to the particulars of his testimony.

When in the first instance he stated that his ear had caught those words—"There is the feeling of the tigress within me!" Winifred felt that she was lost; and there was a powerful though subdued sensation in the Court. When he spoke of the ring which he had beheld upon the right hand of the deceased, and then pronounced the ring which had been found at the prisoner's lodgings to be the self-same one, there was a still deeper sensation: but Winifred made a sudden and abrupt movement as if about to speak. Whether it were, however, that she thought better of it—or that the words to which she would have given utterance, died away in her throat—the spectators could not tell: but certain it was that she remained silent—her head drooped lower than hitherto upon her bosom—and she did not again raise her eyes while Charles De Vere was in the witness-box. Mr. Wardour asked him but very few questions in cross-examination; and these were put with a most gentlemanly courtesy—for every one present admired the straightforward, honest manner in which our hero had given his evidence, and appreciated the feelings of mournful reluctance against which he had been compelled to struggle in the performance of his duty.

The next witness was Mrs. Slater; and this worthy woman was in tears when she entered the box; so that her appearance greatly affected the already sufficiently distressed Winifred. Indeed, the tears now began to trickle down the prisoner's cheeks; and there was a moment when she clung to the dock as if to save herself from falling. A glass of water was handed to her: but she only just touched it with her lips; and then by a strong voluntary effort she conquered her emotions—or at least the outward betrayal of them in the same intemperance as for the few preceding minutes.

Mrs. Slater deposed to the effect that Miss Barrington had lodged at her house for about two years—indeed ever since the death of an aunt with whom she had previously dwelt. The good woman, wiping away her tears, burst forth in a warm eulogy upon Winifred's character: she had suddenly become armed with a courage which surprised herself, when expatiating upon this point. Many a compassionating look was now turned upon the prisoner; and it seemed as if for a mo-

ment the audience forgot, in the new feeling of interest thus created, all those details of Charles De Vere's evidence which were so damnable against her. But that more kindly feeling was speedily dissipated—or at least it merged again into the conviction of her guilt, when Mrs. Slater was compelled reluctantly to confess that on returning home on the preceding day, at about four o'clock, Winifred had a strange wild agitated look. At the conclusion of her evidence, the worthy woman was assisted out of the Court in an almost fainting state; and she returned to her house, very seriously indisposed.

The next witness examined was the conductor of an omnibus plying between Camden Town and the City. He stated that shortly after three o'clock on the previous day, the prisoner, Winifred Barrington, entered his vehicle. It struck him at the time that she was very much excited: and he asked her if any one had insulted her? She only looked at him vacantly and made no answer. He observed that she continued to be more or less agitated during the ride; and on one occasion he perceived that she had drawn her glove from her hand and was contemplating a ring upon her finger. He described the ring; and it corresponded with the one then in Court. When shown it, he at once recognised it. He had noticed all those particulars from the fact that for a considerable portion of the journey it happened that Winifred was the only inside passenger. The conductor was an honest-looking, good-tempered man: he gave his evidence in a straightforward way; and Mr. Wardour had no questions to ask him.

The next witness examined was Rachel, house-keeper at Sidoe Villa. This kind-hearted woman was much affected on account of Winifred, whom she could scarcely believe guilty, and yet on the other hand could scarcely believe her innocent. She merely deposed to the fact of Miss Barrington having been at Sidney Villa during a particular period of the preceding day—that period being shortly previous to the time when the murder must have been committed.

Mr. Meadowbank, the surgeon, was next introduced into the witness-box. He apologized to the magistrate for being so late; but excused himself on the ground that he had been making a most careful examination of the corpse of the deceased Dorothy Chicklade. He deposed that the woman's death had been unquestionably caused by strangulation—or in ordinary parlance, that she had been throttled. He lucidly explained how the external traces of fingers gripping the throat with fierce violence, corresponded with all the internal marks and symptoms. There was likewise about the corpse sufficient evidence to prove that a knee, or some heavy object, had pressed violently at the bottom of the chest,—this statement corroborating the opinion which the policemen had expressed when accounting for the manner in which the brooch was broken. Mr. Meadowbank farther stated, in reply to a question put by the magistrate, that the deceased woman was of attenuated frame—that she could have possessed little physical strength—and that therefore it would not have required a very strong person to overpower her.

"Could you judge from the finger-marks on

the neck," inquired Mr. Wardour, "of the size of the hands the gripe of which must have inflicted death?"

"No," replied the surgeon,—“or at least, it would be a very difficult matter to speculate upon, inasmuch as the entire neck is much swollen, and the marks left by the fingers are thus proportionately altered.”

“Look at the prisoner's hands,” said Mr. Wardour; “and tell me whether you think that those fingers were large enough to leave such traces as you discovered on the neck of the deceased? I myself,” added the learned counsel, “looked at the body this morning. Be so good, Miss Barrington, as to take off your gloves.”

The unhappy prisoner—who appeared to have sunk into a half numbing torpor during the delivery of the surgeon's chief evidence—had seemed to arouse herself suddenly when her counsel spoke, as if she were all in a moment reminded with galvanic vividness that he was the one who could alone say a word in her behalf. She drew off her gloves, and with timid modesty displayed her hands. Every one who beheld them was struck with astonishment at the singular beauty of those hands, so white, so small, so delicate in their symmetry. The surgeon descended from the witness-box, and examined these beautiful hands with considerable attention for upwards of a minute—during which there was so profound a silence in the Court, that a pin, if dropped, might have been heard to fall. And in the meanwhile Winifred's eyes were bent bashfully downward; and now, for the first time this day, there was a slight tint upon her cheeks, as if the rose were jealous of having so long resigned its empire to the pale away of the lily.

Mr. Meadowbank returned to the witness-box; and all regards were now fixed upon him.

“Do you think,” asked Mr. Wardour, “that the hands of the prisoner were those which left their marks upon the neck of the deceased?”

“I should indeed be very sorry to say that they were,” replied Mr. Meadowbank: “but as an honest man, I am compelled to admit that they might have been.”

“You must endeavour, sir,” said Mr. Wardour, “to give us a positive opinion. I will shape my question in another way. Do you think that those delicate fingers”—pointing towards the prisoner—“could have left upon the neck of the deceased marks of such a length, width, and depth as you have seen thereupon?”

“There is no doubt,” answered the surgeon, “that the matter is open to the belief that larger hands inflicted those marks. But still it is my duty to observe that discolouration spreads rapidly in cases of strangulation by violent throttling; and the original marks are altered, disfigured, and changed thereby, as well as by the swelling which ensues.”

“Yet you think, Mr. Meadowbank,” said the learned counsel, “that it would be more satisfactory for those who wish justice to take its course by emitting the guilty person only, if a prisoner with less delicate hands stood in the dock?”

“I certainly should speak more positively on the point,” answered Mr. Meadowbank.

“That will do, sir,” said Mr. Wardour, who thereupon sat down with the complacent satisfac-

tion of a counsel who has gained at least one point in favour of his client.

The Inspector here intimated that this was the case for the prosecution; and in reply to a question by the magistrate, he answered that he did not think he should be enabled to produce any additional evidence if a remand took place for such a purpose.

"Do you wish to make any observations, Mr. Wardour?" inquired the magistrate.

"I am well aware, your worship," responded the learned counsel, "that the matter must go elsewhere for a more complete investigation, and that you have no alternative but to commit the prisoner for trial. Moreover, as I have yet had no opportunity of communicating with my client—or have the solicitors through whose medium I am instructed by the prisoner's friend—I shall say nothing in her defence upon the present occasion. I would only express the hope that the judgment of the public will be suspended until a jury of her countrymen shall have pronounced a final opinion."

Again Winifred made a movement as if to speak—her lips wavered—but again did she remain silent. Her eyes were bent downward once more; and no one could tell, from the fixed expression of her countenance, whence the roseate tint had all fled, what was passing in her thoughts.

It was only three o'clock in the afternoon; and in reply to the magistrate the clerk of the court stated that the depositions would all be in readiness by five. It was therefore resolved that the case should then be completed, in order that the prisoner might be finally committed for trial. The magistrate, conceiving that she must feel very faint after being so long in the dock, directed suitable refreshments to be given her; and in compliance with a request made by Mr. Wardour, he allowed the unhappy girl to retire to his own private room.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAGISTRATE'S ROOM.

WE have already said that Agnes Evelyn was greatly afflicted on receiving the intelligence of the crime imputed to Winifred Barrington. Agnes had conceived a warm interest in the old prisoner's grandchild; and she could not at first possibly bring herself to entertain the conviction that one so amiable, so mild in her manners, so grateful for whatsoever was done for, and so well spoken of by all who knew her, could conceal a heart so black or insinuate so diabolically mischievous. Nevertheless, when Agnes read the account in the morning paper—or at least as much as the journal disclosed of the nature of the evidence which weighed against Winifred, she felt to a certain degree staggered, and her favourable opinion received a shock. Still she came not to the conclusion that Winifred must necessarily be guilty; and the amiable young lady said to herself, "As a Christian I will not abandon her so long as there remains the least chance that the may, after all, prove the victim of circumstantial evidence!"

Early on the morning of the day following the murder, a police constable called at Sidney Villa to intimate to Rachel that she must attend at the police-court; and Agnes inquired of the officer whether she might be allowed to see Winifred? The reply was that if the young lady thought fit to be at the Court in the afternoon, when the examination might possibly be over, she could no doubt have her wish gratified. The amiable Miss Evelyn then bethought herself that legal advice was necessary to a person in Winifred's position—and on this subject she likewise spoke to the constable. But he informed her that Mr. Timperley, on reading the case in the evening papers, had repaired to the station-house, and had intimated to Miss Barrington that he would take her defence in hand.

Agnes—ever mindful of everything which related to charitable or benevolent aims—remembered that Winifred was the support of her grandfather in prison; and she enclosed a bank-note for ten pounds to the Governor of Whitecross Street, requesting that it might be applied to the unfortunate old gentleman's use, and simply signing herself as "A Friend." She sent off the packet by a trusty messenger; and having performed this deed of generosity, she inquired of Floribel whether she felt inclined to accompany her presently to the police-office to see Winifred? Miss Lister had however a thousand excuses to urge: she would not prejudge Winifred, but yet she could not countenance her until her character was thoroughly cleared up; indeed even were it otherwise, she could not possibly think of going to a police-office, where there were all kinds of low people and noxious odours; besides, she had a headache—she wanted to lounge upon the sofa—she had just got into the midst of a most interesting part in a new novel—and she also expected two or three very agreeable persons to call at the identical time when Agnes proposed to pay a visit to Winifred.

Miss Evelyn did not press the point; for she would rather go alone than have an unwilling companion. She sighed inwardly as she thought to herself that the effect of the dream was already wearing off—that her hope of its leaving a beneficial influence behind it was doomed to disappointment—and that her cousin was yielding as much as ever to the frivolities and vanities of life. Agnes felt however that she could not very well proceed alone to the police-office; and she was wondering whom she should seek as a companion, when she suddenly recollected Cicely Neale. She was the more inclined to make Miss Neale her associate in the expedition, inasmuch as by first of all repairing to Lincoln's Inn Fields she might learn either from Mrs. Timperley or from Cicely what the lawyer himself thought of Winifred's case.

To Lincoln's Inn Fields did Agnes accordingly repair; and she found Cicely Neale alone—for Mrs. Timperley had gone out to make some purchases. Cicely received Agnes with the most cordial welcome; and the young ladies almost immediately began to converse upon the tragedy.

"I knew this Winifred Barrington," said Agnes; "and she was at the villa at the same time with yourself yesterday."

"Good heavens, how shocking!" exclaimed



Cicely, who did not on her side think fit to announce that she had been acquainted with one who was also connected with the tragedy—namely, the victim Mrs. Chicklade herself.

"Perhaps, my dear Cicely," answered Agnes, "it may not after all prove so shocking that Winifred has been beneath my roof; for what if her innocence were to transpire?"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Neale: "do you entertain any such hope?"

"I should be very sorry to admit," replied Miss Evelyn, "that I am thoroughly convinced of Winifred's guilt."

"But all the circumstances tend frightfully to her crimination," rejoined Cicely. "Have you seen the morning paper? Ah! by the bye, a gentleman whose name you have mentioned to me—Mr. De Vere—is a principal witness against her."

No. 11.—AGNES.

"Yes—I have seen to-day's paper," answer Agnes. "But what is your uncle's opinion?"

"You know, perhaps, that he has taken the case in hand," said Miss Neale,—"entirely through respect for old Mr. Barrington, the accused girl's grandfather. My uncle went up last evening to the station-house; and he saw Winifred Barrington. He returned with the firm conviction of her guilt."

"Good heaven! in this possible?" exclaimed Agnes, her countenance exhibiting the utmost distress: then, after a pause, she added emphatically, "If Winifred Barrington should prove guilty, it would be almost sufficient to destroy one's confidence in human nature!"

"Seeing that you are thus disposed to be prepossessed in favour of Winifred," said Cicely, with an air of concern, "it grieves me to be compelled to make you acquainted with my uncle's private

opinion. He is an old man—he has had a large experience in the world—and of all persons, lawyers may perhaps be considered the most shrewd in judging the secret thoughts and feelings of others. Well, then, my dear Agnes, Mr. Timperley came home very much distressed from his interview with that girl last evening; and he assured my aunt and myself that he has not the least doubt as to her guilt."

On hearing these words, Agnes was about to say that she would abandon her idea of paying a visit to Winifred—when her compassionate feelings again got uppermost; and she observed, "I have a great inclination to judge for myself. It is not that I pretend to any skill in phrenology or in reading the human soul through the medium of the physiognomy: but in the present case I have a secret impulse—a species of presentiment—I know not how to express myself—which decides me on paying this visit. Dare I ask you, my dear Cicely, to accompany me?"

"Oh, ask me anything but that!" exclaimed Miss Neale, with a visible shudder. "The bare idea of a police-court is enough to frighten one!"

"Pardon me for making the request," said Agnes: "but if you will not accompany me, I must go alone."

"I should be sorry to think that you ventured thither without the countenance of some friend," said Miss Neale, deliberating within herself; "and therefore, if you are so positive, and nothing can deter you, my dear Agnes, I will go with you."

Miss Evelyn expressed her gratitude for this assent on Cicely's part; and at about half-past two o'clock in the afternoon, the two young ladies went forth together. And a couple well calculated to attract interest and attention were Cicely and Agnes. Cicely was the taller of the two, though Miss Evelyn herself was above the medium stature; and if Miss Neale furnished a splendid specimen of a fine-grown, robustly formed young woman—Agnes presented the most perfect model of the sylph. Both had light hair: that of Cicely was now drawn partially off the forehead, and arranged in the French fashion, which admirably became her: that of Agnes was in bands, reaching low beneath the ears. Both were well-dressed—yet without what might be called pretension; and if critical judgment were applied to their toilets, it would have been decided that Miss Evelyn's was the more tastefully neat and elegantly simple.

It was shortly after three o'clock when they reached the police-office in a cab which they had taken for the purpose. A crowd was collected in the street: but the young ladies, remaining a little apart from the outskirts of the multitude, addressed themselves to a police-constable; and he chanced to be the very one whom Agnes had seen in the morning. He told them that the examination was just over, and that the prisoner was to be committed for trial. Agnes was much shocked at this intelligence; but Cicely began questioning the officer in respect to whatever had transpired during the investigation.

"You had better walk in, ladies," said the constable: "or else you will soon be surrounded by the crowd."

He at once gave them admittance by means of the magistrate's private entrance: and Agnes

slipped a liberal fee into his hand as a reward for his civility. When in the passage with which the private door communicated, Cicely renewed her questions; and the officer rapidly sketched the leading features of the examination,—not forgetting to mention that part which so specially referred to the delicate hands of the prisoner and the marks on the neck of the deceased.

"Ah, ladies," he added, "I have no doubt, from all that I have heard, Mrs. Chicklade was a bad enough woman in her way——"

"Come!" said Miss Neale hastily; "let us go and see the unfortunate girl, since that is the object of our visit."

"She is in the magistrate's private room, ladies—and a constable is there," said the officer: "nor will you be suffered to see her without a witness."

"That is of no consequence," responded Agnes; "for we have nothing of a private nature to say to her."

The officer now led the way along the passage; and Cicely whispered to Agnes, "Everything here strikes cold to the heart! It produces a sensation as if we were never to be liberated again!"

"What then must Winifred feel?" asked Miss Evelyn, with a profound sigh: "and still more, what must she feel if she should happen to be innocent?"

Cicely had no time to give any response; for a door at which the constable had gently tapped was now opened: and he stood aside for the two young ladies to enter. They passed in accordingly—the door was closed again—an officer, who was in the room, placed his back against it—and they found themselves in the presence of the unfortunate Winifred. She was seated at the moment in a mood of the profoundest abstraction—her head bent forward—her eyes looking down, but fixed on vacancy—her hands clasped together, yet in that listless manner which showed that they had thus mechanically joined themselves—while the arms drooped to their full length. Her bonnet was on the floor—her shawl was flung negligently upon the table: her countenance was very pale—and her lips were compressed.

"Here are some ladies come to see you," said the police-constable in whose charge she was.

But Winifred did not hear the announcement: she remained motionless, the effigy of blank despair itself.

"Here are some ladies, I say," cried the officer in a louder tone, "who are come——"

"Hush! do not startle her suddenly!" interrupted Agnes, who for the few moments that had elapsed since her entrance into the room, had been contemplating Winifred with the most steadfast attention.

The young girl had been all that day accustomed to hear rude rough voices speaking around her; and thus she had paid no attention to the words of the constable. But the soft sweet voice of Agnes Evelyn stole upon her ear: she heard it at once. Thus may it often be with a sleeper in the night-time, who slumbers on unconscious of the din of the tempest which is roaring and raging without: but if the voice of some beloved one breaks, however lowly and gently, upon the silence of the night, it is heard—it sinks through the medium of the ear down into the heart, and touches some chord which in its vibration arouses the sleeper

into wakefulness. And so it was now with the dull deep reverie of the unhappy Winifred.

"Oh, this is kind—most kind!" she said, starting up from her seat and flinging a look upon Agnes, whose voice, as we have said, she had at once recognised: then she glanced towards Cicely Neale—but this young lady was a stranger to her.

"Winifred! Winifred!" exclaimed Miss Evelyn, in a voice of solemn adjuration; "tell me that you are innocent! Look up to heaven—and imagine that you are speaking in the presence of the Deity himself!"

It was a look of fervid gratitude mingled with a beatific enthusiasm, which Winifred flung upon Agnes—as if she felt that the young lady herself seemed like an angel sent from heaven: and sinking upon her knees, she said, "Oh! believe me—believe me, I am innocent!"

"And I do believe you!" responded Agnes, extending her hand to raise Winifred up. "This is my friend Miss Neale—the niece of Mr. Timperley—and she agreed to accompany me—"

But Agnes stopped short; for she perceived that Winifred was now gazing strangely upon Miss Neale; and she glanced quickly towards her companion. Cicely's countenance was serious and grave, as if she approved not altogether of the precipitation with which her friend Agnes had rushed to the conclusion of Winifred's innocence.

"That young lady," said Miss Barrington, with a deeply sorrowful countenance, "believes me to be guilty. And no wonder!—for circumstances have terribly combined against me. Nearly every one thinks that in the presence of those circumstances it is impossible I can be innocent!"

"Cicely—my dear Cicely," hastily whispered Agnes, "you wrong the poor young woman—I am convinced that you do!"

"I should be indeed sorry to prejudge others severely," said Miss Neale, speaking in a tone that was audible to Winifred as well as to Miss Evelyn herself: "but doubtless, as we have come hither in the capacity of friends and sympathisers—if friendship and sympathy be merited, Miss Barrington can have no possible objection to explain the circumstances which seem to press so heavily against her."

At this moment there was another tap at the door; and the conversation was suspended while the constable opened it. A stout, middle-aged, good-looking gentleman made his appearance. This was Mr. Wardour, who had laid aside his forensic costume, and who had come to have an interview with his client. His name was at once gratefully ejaculated by Winifred; and thus the two young ladies learnt who he was.

"I was not aware," said Mr. Wardour, hesitating whether to enter, "that I might possibly be intruding."

"We are mere visitresses, sir," said Miss Neale. "My companion Miss Evelyn entertains a strong feeling of sympathy on behalf of the accused; and I was just observing that this is the opportunity for the prisoner to explain those circumstances which at present combine fearfully against her."

"As you may suppose, ladies," said Mr. Wardour, "my own object in coming to this room was to have some discourse with my client. I can

scarcely suppose that she will hesitate to speak in your presence; and as for the constable here, he is bound to secrecy in respect to whatsoever he may overhear."

Mr. Wardour sat down; and Winifred looked first at him—then at Agnes and Cicely—then at the police-constable, with a strange expression of countenance, as if she longed to say something, and yet on the other hand had cogent reasons for remaining silent.

"If our presence be a source of embarrassment," said Agnes, in a kind and gentle voice, "we will withdraw."

"How is it possible," asked Miss Neale, "that we who come with the most friendly motives, can be any restraint on Miss Barrington? Those who offer sympathy and friendship where both are so much needed, have a right to be convinced that they are manifesting their good feelings in the proper direction."

Agnes could not help thinking there was something very worldly-minded, almost to harshness and severity, in Cicely's speech; though still, on the other hand, she could not conceal from herself that it indicated a becoming cautiousness:—and she therefore made no comment upon it.

"To you, Mr. Wardour," said Winifred, in a tone that was tremulous with grateful emotions, "my best thanks are due. And, oh, sir!" she cried, with a sudden gush of enthusiasm, at the same time sinking upon her knees, "believe me—I am really innocent!"

"Winifred," said Agnes, hastening forward and bending down towards the unhappy girl as she still retained her kneeling posture,—"tell that worthy gentleman everything! I beseech you to have no secrets from him! Remember it is he who is your representative in the solemn tribunal—it is he who stands as it were between yourself and disgrace—between your safety and your condemnation—between your life, and—and—"

But Agnes stopped short—she could not give utterance to the dreadful phrase "the scaffold," though she would have urged that frightful consideration as a means of inducing Winifred to repose the fullest confidence in her legal adviser.

"Yes, dear young lady!" exclaimed Miss Barrington, starting up from her knees, "I will deal candidly with Mr. Wardour: but—but—I must speak to him alone! I cannot in the presence of others—Oh, I scarcely know what I say!"—and she suddenly burst into tears.

She turned away towards the window. Cicely Neale shook her head ominously; while Mr. Wardour, rising from his seat, hastened to whisper to Agnes, "It has often come within the range of my experience, that persons situated as this unfortunate girl is, may have explanations to give which can only be confided to the ears of their legal advisers. Yet this must not be regarded either as a proof of guilt, or as an evidence of ingratitude for the kind sympathy which may be offered."

"I understand, Mr. Wardour," replied Agnes, also speaking in a low voice: "it will be advisable for my friend and myself to withdraw. We will go. But first of all tell me—tell me, Mr. Wardour—if you do not consider the question an improper one—tell me, what is your opinion?"

The barrister drew Miss Evelyn still farther aside; and he whispered to her, but with em-

phatic accents, "My conviction is that she is innocent!"

"Heaven be thanked!" murmured Agnes, trembling with a deep sense of joy.

"Yet," continued Mr. Wardour, "I am as ignorant as you yourself are of what may be the real interpretation of all those circumstances that have combined so strongly against her. And I must moreover remark that though as a *man* I believe her to be innocent, yet as a *lawyer* I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that unless the explanation of those circumstances be most satisfactory, and be likewise corroborated by additional testimony, a jury can come to no other conclusion than that she is guilty!"

A shade of mournfulness gathered over the countenance of Agnes as Mr. Wardour thus spoke; and she murmuringly whispered, "But she will tell you everything—she has promised to be candid—and we will now leave you with her."

"It is impossible, Miss Evelyn," responded the barrister, "that I should abstain from expressing my admiration for the generous, the noble, and truly Christian feelings which you have displayed towards this unfortunate girl. I do not therefore mind intimating to you that there is a certain degree of mystery in the way in which I have been retained on her behalf. She possesses a friend who will do everything to serve her, and who is firmly convinced of her innocence. The assurances of this friend of hers—the representations thus made to me concerning her—have influenced my own mind, and have triumphed as it were over the belief which in quite an opposite sense I should have entertained, if judging only from the nature of the evidence."

"You mean, Mr. Wardour," said Agnes, "that the evidence would have led you to regard your client as guilty, were it not for those private representations which have been made to you?"

"Such is my meaning, Miss Evelyn," rejoined the barrister. "And now let me entreat you to steal gently forth with your friend. It will be advisable to avoid a painful scene at parting from the poor girl; and I will give her the assurance that if you withdrew stealthily it was not through any change of sentiments in her behalf."

While this discourse was being hurriedly carried on in whispers between Agnes and the barrister, Winifred had seated herself in the window-recess, where she at first wept silently and with averted countenance. She then gradually relapsed into a profound state of abstraction—that half-benumbed condition of the mind in which all the most vital energies are crushed and weighed down by the dream-like nightmare of stupendous consternation. It was of this opportunity that Mr. Wardour was desirous the two ladies should avail themselves; and Agnes, touching Cicely's arm, aroused the latter from a profoundly thoughtful mood into which she herself had sunk. Miss Evelyn beckoned her away—they glided noiselessly towards the door—it was opened by the policeman—and the two ladies passed out.

The noise of opening and shutting the door aroused Winifred from her deep numbing reverie; and she started up from her seat.

"They are gone!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands wildly; "and now perhaps they both believe me guilty!"

"No—you possess the sincerest sympathy of that amiable and excellent young lady, Miss Evelyn," answered Mr. Wardour. "Hush! no more at present!"—then turning to the policeman, the barrister added, "You can leave us together, officer."

The constable at once recognised the privilege of a legal adviser in respect to his client; and he quitted the apartment.

"Miss Evelyn believes that you are innocent," said Mr. Wardour to Winifred, when they were alone together: "and if she departed thus abruptly, it was in consequence of my advice; for I saw that you have something to say to me to which you could not give utterance in the presence of those ladies."

Winifred reflected profoundly for a few moments; and then she asked, "By whom, Mr. Wardour, were you instructed to appear on my behalf?"

"I was instructed by one," replied the barrister, "who evidently entertains the profoundest interest in your welfare—one who proclaimed to me his conviction of your innocence—one with whom you were made acquainted through the very medium of that woman——"

"Enough!" ejaculated Winifred, a deep crimson now suffusing her countenance, which a moment before was ghastly pale. "Then he has told you——"

"Absolutely nothing!" responded Mr. Wardour,—"nothing more, at least, than what I have already stated. He said that everything besides existed as your secret, which he had sworn to retain inviolate. Ignorant of all the details of the evidence which might be brought against you, he looked forward with hope and confidence to your discharge from custody; for it was late last night that he came to me—and the evening papers contained but a short paragraph upon the sad subject. He did not therefore at that time anticipate such a result as your committal. And now, Miss Barrington, it is for you to explain——"

"Yes, sir—I will explain everything!" said Winifred, with a sudden access of firmness. "I will give you these explanations for several reasons. In the first place because I so emphatically pledged myself to Miss Evelyn that I would do so: in the second place because your own generous and noble conduct towards me demands my fullest confidence; and in the third place because you at least shall be enabled, whatsoever may be the result, to give the assurance of my innocence to such kind friends as Miss Evelyn and Mrs. Slater who have shown that they believe me guiltless."

"But you forget, Miss Barrington," said Mr. Wardour, "the most important reason of all wherefore you should give me these explanations. It is that I may use them for your defence when the time shall come——"

"Ah, Mr. Wardour!" exclaimed Winifred firmly; "it may be that those explanations shall never be thus used at all! In a word, it is under the seal of the strictest secrecy that I am about to tell you everything."

"Do you mean me to understand, Miss Barrington," asked Mr. Wardour, in amazement, "that you will not avail yourself of every possible means to prove your innocence?"

"I mean sir," she responded, with continued firmness, "that I will not avail myself of the explanations I am about to give you, for my defence on the day of trial."

The barrister gazed with wonderment upon the young woman; and at length he said, "Understand me well, Miss Barrington. It is my duty as your advocate to put into requisition every possible means that shall come within my reach to demonstrate your innocence; and therefore I can give no pledge of secrecy on any point relating thereto."

"In that case, sir," answered Winifred mournfully, "I must recall my pledge—I must remain silent."

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Wardour, "what deep mysterious meaning is there in all this?"

But Winifred gave no answer: she only looked with a deep deprecating sorrow upon the benevolent and intelligent countenance of the barrister.

"You assure me," he resumed, "that you are innocent?"

"Oh, yes!" she cried, clasping her hands together,—"as innocent as you yourself are!"

"Do you apprehend," inquired Mr. Wardour, "that your explanations, if given, would inculpate any other person in whom you may be interested?"

"No!" rejoined Winifred. "I am utterly at a loss to conceive who could be the perpetrator of the crime. I swear to you that this is the truth!"

"Perhaps, then, Miss Barrington," resumed Mr. Wardour,—"pardon me for what I am about to say—but it is necessary,—perhaps you are apprehensive that your revelations—I scarcely know how to express myself—But, in short, the deceased woman's character was a very bad one—she may have beguiled your innocence—she may have led you astray as she has doubtless done many others in her time—"

"Oh, Mr. Wardour!" cried Winifred, with burning blushes upon her cheeks; "give me an opportunity of telling you the entire tale!—swear to me that you will respect it as a secret to be revealed only in a certain contingency, which I will likewise explain—I mean in case a particular event should happen—which, alas! may be only too probable! Swear to me, in this sense, I repeat—and I will at once tell you everything. Then you will know all! You will comprehend wherefore I gave utterance to those words respecting *the spirit of a tigress being aroused within me*—you will understand also how the ring came into my possession—and what I meant when in a paroxysm of anguish I besought the constable not to take it from me, for that he was ignorant how much it had cost me to obtain it! Oh, let me in confidence tell you everything! I would fain merit your good opinion—and it would be a deep, deep solace to me to know that I have placed you in a position to give the assurance of my innocence wheresoever sympathy is experienced on my behalf!"

Mr. Wardour meditated profoundly for some minutes: he was much struck by the impassioned and vehement manner in which Winifred had spoken; and he reflected within himself that for a thousand reasons it would be better, as her advocate, to be acquainted with the whole truth than

to have to grope his way in the dark. Besides, he was not unmindful of the fact that though a pledge of secrecy might prevent him from dealing in a direct manner with the explanations his client offered to give,—yet that he might be enabled to draw upon them indirectly, and without a violation of the sacred confidence reposed in him, for materials to serve as hints and suggestions for the line of defence to be adopted on the day of the trial. And then, too, there was a contingency to be associated with the pledge of secrecy—or rather with the maintenance of that silence; and it was expedient that he should learn what anticipated event could possibly exercise so powerful an influence over the circumstances in which his client was placed. All these considerations, therefore, decided Mr. Wardour in the course that he should adopt; and he at length said, "I will give you, Miss Barrington, the solemn pledge which you require."

"But remember, Mr. Wardour," said Winifred, "that this promise is not to be lightly given!—it is not to be hereafter violated, and then the violation itself justified—or attempted to be justified—by the plea that confidence was sacrificed by the barrister to the vital interests of the client!"

"All this I understand, Miss Barrington," was the response: "or at least I understand that it is your earnest wish and solemn stipulation—and both shall be respected."

"Yes, Mr. Wardour," continued Winifred, now drawing close to the barrister and speaking in a low deep voice and with a strange fixedness of look: "yes—even though I should be brought to the very extremity itself—that I should have one foot planted upon the steps leading to the scaffold!"

"I understand—and I assent!" rejoined the professional gentleman. "Strange, unaccountable girl that you are!" he exclaimed, contemplating her earnestly; and he thought within himself, "There is either idiocy to deplore in all this—or else there is something magnanimous and self-sacrificing to admire!"

Winifred now took a chair opposite to that in which Mr. Wardour had seated himself; and she commenced her narrative. But we are not at present enabled to initiate the reader into the mysteries of these explanations. Suffice it to say that they were listened to with the profoundest interest—and that when they were concluded, Mr. Wardour argued at length with his young client. She however proved firm to her purpose; and that purpose remained utterly unshaken when Mr. Wardour took leave of her.

Soon after five o'clock Winifred Barrington was conducted from the magistrate's private room, and was again placed in the dock. All the witnesses were once more present (with the exception of Mrs. Slater, who had been taken home ill) to hear the depositions read over; and the magistrate then formally committed the prisoner to Newgate, to take her trial at the next session of the Central Criminal Court for the murder of Dorothy Chicklade.

On the following day the Coroner held an inquest upon the body, at the public-house to which it had been conveyed; and the same testimony (with the exception of that of Mrs. Slater) as had been given before the magistrate, was adduced at

this second investigation. The prisoner was not however present at the inquiry: for many of our readers are doubtless aware that the Coroners for Middlesex have long been at loggerheads with the magistrates in respect to the right of having prisoners under such circumstances brought up before them; and the Secretary of State has refused to interfere with the authority of a magistrate's remand or committal. Thus, in consequence of this dispute, Winifred was spared the ordeal of being present at a second examination into her case; and we must now leave the unfortunate girl in Newgate.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LETTERS.

It was between eight and nine o'clock in the evening of the day on which Winifred's examination at the police-court had taken place, that Cicely Neale, dressed in very plain apparel, and with a thick black veil concealing her countenance, alighted from a cab in Fitzroy Square. She at once dismissed the vehicle, and bent her way on foot towards Norton Street, which is in the immediate neighbourhood of that Square.

Norton Street is not famed for its exceeding respectability: indeed within the last year or two the nuisances occasioned by houses of evil repute in that thoroughfare, have been brought before the public through the medium of the newspapers, and have been rendered subjects of complaint on the part of the tradesmen and the few respectable persons who dwell in the locality. Of an equally bad renown was Norton Street in the year 1848, of which we are writing; and yet Cicely Neale, in spite of having read in the daily journals that such was its ill fame, was now wending her way thither—unattended—between eight and nine o'clock in the evening.

On entering the street, Cicely glanced, by the aid of the lamp-light, at the numbers on the doors of the houses, to see which way they ran; and having ascertained the point, she proceeded in the direction of a particular dwelling which she sought. She soon reached it; and she rang at the bell—for she would not use the knocker, for fear lest the sound might arrest the notice of the passers-by. The door was almost instantaneously opened by a middle-aged woman, somewhat flauntingly dressed, although she was nothing but a servant. She gave a certain significant leer—at once closed the front door when Cicely had crossed the threshold—and without saying a word, conducted her into a parlour, where the curtains were closed, lights were burning, and a fire was also blazing—for it was the beginning of October, and the evenings were cold.

"You perhaps expect to meet some one here, ma'am?" said the woman, with a half-fawning, half-familiar manner.

"No," replied Cicely, with a species of disdainful peremptoriness. "I wish to speak to the mistress of the house—Mrs. Maddox, I believe her name is?"

"Oh! very good, ma'am," responded the woman. "Mrs. Maddox shall be with you immediately."

She then retired; and in less than a minute Mrs. Maddox made her appearance. She was a woman of about forty: she had evidently once been handsome; but her cheeks were now covered with rouge; and her figure had lost all its pristine symmetry in a gross *embonpoint*. She was apparelled with a mingled richness and tawdriness; she had a bold insolent look, and a manner which was less fawning but more familiar than that of her domestic.

Cicely had remained standing in front of the fire, with her veil still closely drawn over her countenance, and so disposed in several thick folds as to defy as much as possible the gaze of Mrs. Maddox from obtaining a glimpse of her features. The instant the woman of the house made her appearance, Miss Neale turned towards her; and through that thick curtaining veil she surveyed her with a keen penetrating glance, as if to ascertain whether she were a person likely to fall into the views and objects which had brought the young lady thither.

"Pray be seated, ma'am," said Mrs. Maddox, politely placing a chair for the accommodation of her visitress.

"It is not necessary," answered Miss Neale, disguising her voice somewhat. "My business will be soon explained; and you can speedily state whether it is in your power to assist me in my aim. I may not take up more than half-a-dozen minutes of your time; but here are as many guineas to recompense you."

"I'm sure, ma'am, I'm exceedingly obliged," answered Mrs. Maddox, accepting the coins which were thrust into her hand, and inwardly hoping that it might indeed prove in her power to assist the object of one who gave such an earnest of her liberality.

"I shall speedily come to the point," proceeded Miss Neale; "but I may as well observe in the first instance, that if you be able and willing to render me the service I seek, double the amount which I have just placed in your hands shall be yours."

"I am willing enough, ma'am," rejoined Mrs. Maddox; "and if I should be fortunate enough to find myself able—But won't you sit down, and take a glass of wine or some little refreshment?"

"No," answered Cicely, who perfectly well comprehended that the woman's curiosity was piqued in respect to her countenance over which she so carefully maintained the folds of her veil. "And now to the point. I believe it was in this house—at least so the newspapers say—that Mrs. Chicklade—"

"Ah, yes! poor dear creature!" said Mrs. Maddox, suddenly deeming it expedient to fall into the dismals. "As good a woman—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Cicely: "none of this maudlin hypocrisy with me!"

"Well, ma'am, I dare say you are right," answered Mrs. Maddox quickly: "for a more infamous old hag than Mrs. Chicklade never existed: and perhaps it is quite as well—"

"I have not come to discuss the merits of that question," interjected Cicely, with a renewed peremptoriness of tone. "Have the kindness to listen, with as little comment of your own as possible. Mrs. Chicklade lived here—and I suppose

that when the intelligence reached you of her death, you thought proper to lock up her boxes and other effects, whatever she may have possessed, in case any one should come forward to claim them as her heir?"

"Oh, dear me, ma'am!" exclaimed Mrs. Maddox, for a moment looking frightened: "everything belonging to the poor dear—I mean the shocking bad woman, has been taken the utmost care of: and if you, ma'am, have any claim, and will of course prove it——"

"I claim upon the woman?—heaven forbid!" cried Miss Neale, disdainfully.

"Well, ma'am," responded Mrs. Maddox, taking courage, "I was thinking to myself that a young, elegant, and handsome young lady such as you are——"

"Cease this flattering nonsense," interrupted Cicely. "How do you know that I am handsome? It is the very reverse: I am as ugly as Sin," she added, feeling quite confident that the dense folds of her veil might well enable her thus to columnist her own good looks. "Understand me well! I have no claim upon the late Mrs. Chicklade: I should hang or drown myself if I had the misfortune to be of the remotest kinship with such a person. Neither am I come to interfere with anything that you may have done in reference to her goods and chattels. If you found a hoard of guineas in her box and substituted halfpence, it is nothing to me."

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Maddox, "what a singular lady you are!"—and she affected to hold up her hands in admiring astonishment.

"Perhaps so," rejoined Miss Neale quietly. "But whatever you may have done with money or trinkets belonging to the deceased, you will at least admit that if there were any letters or papers in her box, they are of no use to you."

"Oh, dear me, ma'am!" ejaculated Mrs. Maddox, "I can assure you I never opened a single letter that I found in the box——"

"Well then there were letters," interrupted the young lady with emphasis. "That admission is made—and it is a step in the right direction. Now the object of my visit may be explained in a few words. I want you to give me up every document, letter, paper—even to the veriest scrap—that you may have found in Mrs. Chicklade's box. Do this at once—and I make up to twenty guineas the sum already placed in your hand."

"Well, ma'am, I confess," answered Mrs. Maddox, straining her eyes with all her might to penetrate through the folds of Cicely's veil, yet without appearing to do so—and failing also in the attempt, for the thick black lace was impervious to the woman's regards; "well, ma'am, I confess that there was a little packet of papers; and I take heaven to witness I have not yet had time—I mean to say I have not had the impatient curiosity to pry into them."

"But you have put them away somewhere?" said Miss Neale inquiringly: "you did not give them up to the police when they came to the house; for if you had, the incident would have been mentioned at the examination of the murderer to-day—and I was at the Court and have learnt everything that transpired, besides reading it all in the evening paper."

"Well, no, ma'am," rejoined Mrs. Maddox, "I did not give the letters up to the police. In the first place these fellows are so excessively bumpitious that I for one should not think of helping them in any single respect. In the second place, though I agree with you that Mrs. Chicklade was a bad woman, yet there would be no use in letting the poor wretch's private matters come before the world. And in the third place, ma'am, how do I know but what some respectable and good names might be delicately mixed up in those letters? You understand me, ma'am?"

"I understand you so well," answered Cicely, "that I should be a fool to suppose you do not penetrate the reason for which I want to get possession of those papers. I see plain enough that you have secreted them somewhere; and you were right in so doing. Now, here is the money," added Miss Neale, shaking her purse to show that it was well filled; "and when you produce the papers, my pledge shall be liberally redeemed."

"And you promise me, ma'am," said Mrs. Maddox hesitatingly; "that it's all square, and that this is no plant put upon an unsuspecting body——"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Cicely, the emphasis with which she spoke receiving an impulse from her disgust at the slang terms made use of by the woman. "Do you think that if the police had suspected you had secreted such papers, and that they were of any use, so wretched a trick as this would be resorted to as a means of obtaining them, when a search-warrant might be issued and a posse of constables would overwhelm your establishment in a moment?"

"True!" said Mrs. Maddox, her mind evidently relieved by this stern and home-thrusting line of argument from the lips of her strange visitress. "Well, ma'am, the papers may be your's; but still, as they are perhaps of more value than I at present have an idea of, I would rather wait till to-morrow before I conclude the bargain——"

"Now or never!" interrupted Miss Neale emphatically. "I see what you are aiming at. It is to get a better price for your papers. I will give you twenty guineas in addition to the sum you have already received—and not one shilling more! You may be cunning—but I am decisive. We now understand each other. Not another word is necessary. Accept or decline the bargain, just as you think fit: but tell me now and at once."

"Well, ma'am, it shall be as you wish," responded Mrs. Maddox, who saw that she had indeed a decisive character to deal with: then, with a significant smile, she asked, "Isn't it rum, though, that you should have been standing all this while just above the very things we have been talking about?"

"Not at all extraordinary, since you have concealed them there," observed Miss Neale;—and she stepped off the hearthrug as Mrs. Maddox stooped down towards it.

The woman rolled it partially up and raised a portion of the carpet which it had covered: she then lifted a piece of one of the planks forming the floor; and from the recess which it revealed, she produced a small packet of letters, tied round with a dingy bit of ribbon. Cicely had plunged her regards into the recess, so as to make sure that all the documents which it contained were

being handed over to her; and satisfied upon the point, she counted down twenty guineas upon the table. These Mrs. Maddox grasped with avidity; and Miss Neale, having secured the packet about her person, issued from the room.

"Permit me?" said Mrs. Maddox, officiously hastening forward in the passage to open the front door.

"Do not trouble yourself," said Cicely, getting before her: "I would rather open the door for myself."

At the same time—while with one hand upon the latch—with the other she dexterously drew forth the key; and this little proceeding was totally unobserved by Mrs. Maddox.

"Good evening, ma'am," said this woman, wondering whether she should ever see her strange visitress again, and wondering also what her face could be like: for never once throughout the interview had she obtained the slightest glimpse of Miss Neale's features.

"Good evening," answered Cicely: and she issued from the house.

The front door closed behind her—she thrust the key into the lock—turned it—drew it forth, and then dropped it down the area.

"I cannot now be followed!" she said to herself, as she passed rapidly along the street. "The woman knows not who I am—suspects not—and never can ascertain! She was burning with curiosity—but I have disappointed her in every respect!"

Miss Neale was infinitely delighted with the result of her visit to the house of questionable reputation in Norton Street. She walked on at a quick pace, in order to obtain a cab as speedily as possible to take her home: but just as she was turning a corner into another street, she was suddenly caught round the waist by a tall young gentleman, who was smoking a cigar, and who exclaimed, "Whither away so quick, my pretty one?—for I'll be bound that this veil covers no common-looking countenance!"

The words were spoken with the insolent familiarity of a young rake who fancied that he was fully justified in thus treating any female whom he might chance to meet alone in that neighbourhood and at that hour of the evening. The single ejaculation, "Ah!" came from the lips of Cicely, as by a sudden turn she released herself from the arm that had been thrown round her waist: and then she stood for a few moments as if irresolute what course to adopt.

"Come, lift that veil of your's," said the young rake, "and let me see the features it covers. If the face corresponds with the form——"

"Follow me!" Miss Neale suddenly said, speaking in a feigned tone as she laid her hand upon the gentleman's arm: and she hastened along the street, having satisfied herself by a glance thrown over her shoulder, that he was upon her track.

The adventure seemed to promise amusement, if not novelty; and the gentleman had not therefore hesitated to obey her invitation that he should follow. She led the way into Fitaroy Square; and when the disreputable quarter which she had just visited was thus escaped from, she stopped short. The gentleman immediately rejoined her; and she raised her veil.

"Cicely!" he ejaculated, starting back in astonishment: "is it possible?"

"Yes—it is I, Hector," she answered. "I have sought an interview with you—and accident has now favoured my wish."

"Accident indeed!" cried the Hon. Mr. Hardress—for he the gentleman was. "And a pretty place I find you in——"

"Hector," interrupted Miss Neale, half-indignantly and half-reproachfully, "if I were indeed reduced to that state of infamy which is implied by your suspicion, whose fault would it be? But bad as you are—and badly therefore as you may judge of others—you cannot seriously and deliberately think that I have sunk down to such degradation as this!"

"My dear girl," answered Hector, now expressing his moustache with a cool superciliousness, while his tone indicated a sort of half-insolent, half-patronising familiarity, "it certainly is not unnatural I should have entertained such a suspicion on finding you in such a neighbourhood. Perhaps you would believe me if I were to proclaim that my sole object in visiting it was to distribute religious tracts, or seek to reform some of the unfortunate creatures——"

"A truce to this hideous mockery!" ejaculated Miss Neale, with accents of indigation and disgust. "For my own sake I will tell you why I am here. Do you not know that a certain person who on occasions has only too well served your purposes——"

"Ah! you allude to Mother Chicklade?" interjected Hardress, with a cool contemptuousness of tone. "Well, she has met her death at last—but I cannot see what that has got to do with your presence in this neighbourhood."

"Are you ignorant that the vile woman herself lived in this neighbourhood?" demanded Cicely: "have you not read that much in the newspapers?"

"Yes—now that I recollect," said Hardress, "she *did* live in the very street from which you were issuing forth so rapidly."

"And perhaps," continued Cicely, "it may occur to you that there was a possibility of this woman being in possession of some letters or billets in which my name might be mentioned: for I believe that she was occasionally honoured by receiving a written communication from the gentleman whom I am now addressing?"

There was a certain sarcasm and a subdued bitterness pervading Miss Neale's accents as she thus spoke; while her eyes were fixed upon the countenance of the young patrician.

"Ah, yes," he said, with a careless indifference of tone and manner; "it is probable that if the dame were in the habit of preserving her papers at all, she may have had specimens of my handwriting amongst them."

"And although the Hon. Hector Hardress," continued Cicely, "may be utterly indifferent in respect to his own name being found figuring amongst the papers which such a woman might possess, it is not so with me. If those letters were published to the world, the Hon. Hector Hardress need not hold his head one whit less high than at present: the colour need not deepen upon his cheeks: he would have no fear that the finger of scorn would point at him—that his com-



panions would shun him—or that society would repudiate him. But is it so with me? No, Hector—and you know it! *You* may make a jest and a boast of that which to *me* would be degradation, dishonour, and ruin! And now do you comprehend wherefore I could have done so much violence to my feelings as to plunge amidst those mazes of infamy—dive for a few minutes into one of those cesspools of abhorrent vice and loathsome impurity—and purchase with gold those documents which may possibly be the proofs and records of my own shame?"

"And was it really for this that you visited the neighbourhood?" inquired Hector.

"For no other reason," responded Cicely; and the tone of both was growing more serious. "I am residing with my uncle and aunt in Lincoln's Inn Fields: I have stolen forth on some pretext—and I have accomplished my aim. Perchance it may prove that my apprehension was groundless

and my precaution unnecessary; but if so, at least no harm will have been done. If however, on the other hand, the apprehension were well founded and the precaution were well taken, so much the better! I shall in that case have saved myself from the total loss of those wrecks of happiness which your perfidy has left me."

"And how long have you been in London, Cicely?" asked Hector, not appearing to notice the bitter allusion contained in her last words.

"Only a few days," she replied. "I waited and waited to see whether the dream in which I was cradling myself would be fulfilled—whether your long silence would at length be broken and accounted for: I could not resign myself to the idea that I was utterly abandoned! At last it became impossible to live any longer in such a delusion—to feed myself with hopes which only turned into the gall of despair; and so I resolved to come up to London. You know that after my

mother's death, my aunt Mrs. Timperley wished me to reside henceforth with her; you know also the motives for which I refused. But every letter which I from time to time received from my aunt assured me that I should find a home with her whenever I chose to accept it; and therefore I at length gave up the cottage—I left the neighbourhood of Cambridge—and I came to London."

"And perhaps you have done well, Cicely," answered Hector, again relapsing into his accustomed tone of careless indifference and fashionable languor; "for the reputation of a young lady, living in the neighbourhood of a University—alone and unprotected—could scarcely fail to suffer. Not that I believe there was ever a suspicion entertained of anything that passed between you and me: for, thanks to the assistance of the old dame that has just met her death, everything was so well managed as to defy suspicion. So that now being in London—and as I have understood that your uncle and aunt, though I have not the pleasure of knowing them, see a good deal of society—you will have an opportunity of captivating some handsome and wealthy young fellow—"

"Your words are an outrage!" suddenly ejaculated Miss Neale with vehemence. "Is it possible that you can mean to insult me thus?"

"Insult you, my dear girl?" responded Hardress. "I really had no such intention. You just now said something of making a boast of one's amour; but I pledge you my honour that I have never breathed your name disrespectfully."

"If I thought that you had, Hector," quickly rejoined Miss Neale, her eyes flashing with fierceness, "I would be bitterly avenged—much as I have loved you—and much," she added, her voice losing its vehemence and sinking into a mournful lowness, "as I still love you."

"Well, I am sure," observed Hector, "if there was any harm in my expressing the supposition that you would endeavour to settle yourself comfortably by marriage—"

"Dare not allude to it!" ejaculated Cicely. "Do you think that I would play so treacherous a part towards any honourable and confiding man who in the belief of my virtue should offer me his hand? No—I would not do it! Or again, Hector," continued Miss Neale, gazing fully upon him with her large blue eyes, "do you think that I have released you from your sacred pledges and solemn promises—or that I have resigned my love and my hope?"

"Cicely," answered Hector, "you are no silly romantic girl—your age, I remember, corresponds pretty closely with my own—and therefore you are twenty-two. You are a young woman, and not a pining Miss fresh from the boarding-school. You must therefore know what value to attach to the oaths and protestations made by a young fellow when he was a student at the University. I see that we must understand each other—"

"It was precisely for this reason," interjected Cicely, "that I was anxious to obtain an interview with you! For your peace and for my own reputation, I have forbore from seeking you at your father's mansion. But now at last we have met; and I will ask you, Hector Hardress, to tell me whether you seriously and deliberately intend

to become perjured and forsworn—whether you can scatter to the winds all the vows which you invoked heaven itself to attest—and whether you dare treat with levity the awful oaths you pledged to me in the sight of God?"

"Now look you, my dear Cicely," answered Hector, "all this would read uncommonly well in a romance—it would be startling and effective—but it will not do for a reasonable couple standing in the midst of the very unromantic region of Fitzroy Square."

"By this admixture of levity and insolence—of superciliousness and outrage," said Miss Neale, "I am to understand that you dare become a perjurer—that you have the courage to be forsworn! Beware, Hector Hardress!—there is retribution to be dealt by the hand of an offended heaven: and there is vengeance to be inflicted by that of a wronged and deceived woman! You have a sister, the beautiful Josephine—you have often spoken to me of her—you have mentioned her lovingly and affectionately when you were a different being from what you now are,—when you were unspoilt by the frivolities, the duplicities, and I am afraid that I may even say the villainies of that dissipated world in which you are moving. But if any one were to deceive your sister as you have deceived me—if any one were to wrong and outrage her as you have wronged and outraged me—"

"Come, Cicely," interrupted Hector, "this is a topic on which I do not choose to converse."

"And yet it is one on which you shall hear me!" replied Miss Neale, with that firmness which belonged to her character. "I see that I have touched you upon a vulnerable point. You would avenge your sister's disgrace—you would seek to wipe away her dishonour in the blood of her betrayer! But if such be your feelings and such your sentiments, how can you entertain the hope of playing in your own person the part of a betrayer with impunity? Cicely Neale has a heart as well as the Honourable Josephine Hardress. She has likewise a reputation as well as that lady: and her good name is as dear to her and to her friends as that of the Honourable Josephine Hardress is to herself and to her own family! Therefore, once again I say—"

"Cicely," interrupted the young patrician with vehemence, "I will hear no more upon the subject! You are not so mad as to think that I can espouse you. But after everything that has taken place between us, I am willing to repair to the extent of my power whatsoever wrong—"

"Stop, Hector!" cried Cicely, her cheeks becoming excessively pale, and her white teeth gleaming between the full lips whence the rich colour had fled, and which were quivering with the strength of her emotions: "it would only require this last insult to turn all my love into hatred and to render me implacably your foe! But let us not come to that point: drive me not to that extreme! Oh, I am well aware that when the diadem of purity has once fallen from the brow of a woman, her libertine betrayer rushes to the conclusion that with gold he may indemnify her—that with gold he can heal the wounds that his perfidy has dealt in her sensitive and too confiding heart! And doubtless there are many women who will accept that indemnification, and who in the sordidness, the selfishness

and the depravity of their feelings will regard gold as a balm for those wounded hearts of theirs. But I am not one of them!"

"In the name of heaven, Cicely," cried Hector Hardress, "cut short this tirade, and tell me to what it is all to lead. We have already stood here for a good half-hour—and we shall presently attract disagreeable notice."

"To you, at least, such notice cannot be unpleasant," answered Cicely, with a haughty, ominous coolness of tone and manner,—“inasmuch as you voluntarily seek neighbourhoods of a confirmed evil repute. As for myself, I can speedily escape from the inconvenience of any special observation:”—and she drew the folds of her veil over her countenance. “As for that speech,” she continued, “which you have so ungenerously and with so much want of manly courtesy denominated a *tirade*, I will cut it short. I no longer deceive myself with the slightest hope in your honour, your good faith—no, nor even in your compassion and your mercy. But you shall not trample, Hector Hardress, even upon the worm, with impunity!—for that worm shall turn against you. If you scorn and despise me, I will be significantly avenged!”

“I am sorry to hear you speaking in this strain, Cicely,” responded Hardress; “because it is really insensate on your part, and you will perhaps only drive me to the declaration that I defy such vague and empty threats.”

“They are neither vague nor empty,” answered Miss Neale, with a strange firmness of tone, as if she were confident of being enabled to carry out her menaces with a fearful effect. “It is impossible that an injured woman, who devotes herself heart and soul to the task of vengeance—who broods over it by day and dreams of it by night—who is ever on the watch for the opportunity to execute it—who is determined to shrink at nothing that may tend to the furtherance of her purpose—it is impossible, I say, that such a woman can ultimately fail in the attainment of her object. That opportunity may present itself to-morrow—or it may be patiently awaited for years: but still sooner or later it will come! Oh, rest assured that it will come! And now, Hector, I have no more to say. You have decided that hatred is to take the place of love: let it be so! She who was most devoted in her love, can prove most implacable in her hatred.”

Having thus spoken, Cicely Neale glided rapidly away from the spot where she had for upwards of half-an-hour stood in discourse with the young patrician; and he remained gazing after her with a certain vague sensation of dismay and affright, until she disappeared from his view in the nearest street diverging from the square. He then forced himself to give utterance to a low chuckling laugh of scorn and contempt: but by degrees these were veritably the feelings which took possession of his mind in regard to Cicely Neale, when the stronger and sterner influence which her parting words temporarily shed upon him had worn off.

But let us return to Cicely Neale. When at some little distance from Fitzroy Square, she relaxed her pace: she began to walk more slowly: she required leisure as it were to collect her thoughts and review deliberately everything that had taken place between herself and Hector Hard-

ress. Hatred was henceforth to become the substitute for love; and it is a sad, sad period of a woman's life—a fearful turning-point in her destiny, when she has to open her eyes to the tremendous reality of such a position as this. The letters which she had obtained at the house in Norton Street were now almost forgotten: she thought only of her blighted hopes—of the wrong she had sustained—of the perfidies which had made her a victim. She even forgot for some while that she was pursuing her way on foot instead of taking a cab,—until at last she stopped short, ejaculating within herself, “All that I now feel is a weakness—whereas I ought to be strong!”

Then a change took place within her. With a mighty effort she repelled as it were the softness and the mournfulness of her emotions: she nerved herself as though it were for a struggle—as if she had undertaken some stupendous enterprise or some exploit needing a marvellous display of heroism. She summoned a cab, and proceeded to Lincoln's Inn Fields.

On returning to the lawyer's house, Cicely Neale soon retired to her chamber, for it was now close upon eleven o'clock. She sat down to examine the packet of papers which she had brought with her from Norton Street. And well was it for her that she had obtained possession of these documents; for she soon found that there were indeed letters amongst them, written by Hector Hardress, which related to herself, and which compromised her even more than she could possibly have apprehended. She perceived that the love of Hector was never such as during her dream of bliss she had fancied it to be—and that from the very first he must have intended to betray her. She saw that in these letters he spoke of her with a levity which was incompatible with a real affection—and that her seduction, instead of having been the result of a moment when the passion of both was stronger than their discretion, was from the first a deliberately intended project on his part. It would be impossible to describe how the large blue eyes of Cicely Neale flamed up with the most sinister fires—how her whole countenance became convulsed with the workings of her inward emotions—and how between her pale lips and her gleaming teeth hissed forth more than once the words, “I will be avenged!”

But amidst that packet of papers there were several other letters, in addition to those which, when a student at the University, Hector Hardress had written to Mrs. Chicklade. There were epistles from several noblemen and gentlemen, bearing different dates, and having reference to a variety of intrigues, in which the services of that infamous woman were required. But Cicely Neale experienced not the slightest interest in the mysteries that were thus revealed to her knowledge: her whole thoughts were absorbed in everything that concerned herself. Nevertheless, she carefully examined each successive letter which she took up; and the very last one which came to her hand—the one which lay at the bottom of the pile, but which bore the most recent date—suddenly excited a new feeling of interest in her.

She recognised the handwriting; and she was astounded. She opened the letter; and then her wonderment grew into the most stupendous sur-

price that ever seized upon a human being. The contents of this letter were very brief; but they must have been significant enough—or at least they rapidly conjured up ideas and associations which now absorbed Cicely's mind to such a degree that her own wrongs as well as her thoughts of vengeance were for the time forgotten.

"Heaven! is it possible? can it be?" she asked within herself; and with her elbow resting on the table, and her hand supporting her head, she fell into the profoundest meditation.

At length she slowly began to waken up as it were from that depth of thought. She now sorted all the letters:—those which bore no reference to her own affairs, she consigned to the flames: but those which had been written by Hector Hardress to the deceased Mrs. Chicklade, as well as that one epistle of stupendous import which had filled her with so much wonderment, she carefully locked up in her desk. It was long however before she retired to rest: she had so much to think of;—and when she did at length seek her couch, her slumber was haunted with strange, wild, and fearful dreams.

Before concluding this chapter, we will put the reader in possession of some few additional facts respecting Cicely Neale. Her father was the brother of Mrs. Timperley: he was an attorney, and in practice at Cambridge. Being a man of extravagant habits and inclined to dissipation, he was neglectful of his business: he was therefore poor; and when his brother-in-law Mr. Timperley was down in the world, he was unable to assist him. Cicely was an only child. Her father died when she was a girl; and the widowed Mrs. Neale retired with her orphan daughter to a cottage some three or four miles distant from Cambridge. Mr. Neale had left his affairs in a condition so closely bordering on insolvency that when his debts and funeral expenses were paid, there was nothing left for the widow and child. Mrs. Neale had however three or four relations residing in different parts of the country, and who were in easy circumstances. They generously contributed enough for her maintenance; and they paid for Cicely's boarding-school expenses. When Cicely was about nineteen years of age, she lost her mother; and the relations just referred to, each offered her a home until something could be done to place her out in the world,—one and all suggesting that she must endeavour to earn her bread as a governess, for which capacity she had been by education qualified. Mrs. Timperley, however, who wrote to Cicely about the same time, proffered the orphan girl an asylum without any such condition as that which was attached to the proposals of her other relatives. On the contrary, Mrs. Timperley with frankness stated that she should like to have her niece as a companion, and even hinted at the possibility of her adoption by Mr. Timperley and herself, as they were childless. Cicely Neale—possessing a spirit but little suited for the servility and drudgery belonging to the life of a governess—at once rejected the offers of all the relations on her mother's side, and she half made up her mind to accept the proposal made her by Mrs. Timperley—though she did not immediately signify this much to the lawyer's wife, but merely stated that she would give a final answer when her feelings should have some-

what recovered from the shock produced by her mother's death.

The late Mrs. Neale had been a parsimonious and saving woman. Quite different from her husband, she abhorred extravagant habits; and her economy had merged into meanness,—though perhaps her conduct deserved not so harsh a term, inasmuch as if she hoarded to the extent of her power, it was for the sake of her daughter. Thus she did not expend the full allowance made by her relatives; and after her death, upwards of two hundred pounds were discovered by Cicely in her mother's writing-desk. With this provision the orphan Miss Neale was enabled to remain at the cottage until such time that she should decide finally upon her half-formed resolve of accepting a home in Lincoln's Inn Fields. But after the lapse of a few months a circumstance transpired which induced Cicely to change her mind altogether upon that point. Accident threw her in the way of Hector, then a student at one of the Colleges of the University. They met occasionally and stealthily. Cicely—then an artless unsophisticated girl of between nineteen and twenty, but with no more experience in the world than if she had been four or five years younger—soon learnt to love the handsome and elegant Hector with the fondest devotion; and she believed that this love was reciprocated in all its purity and sincerity.

For a young lady to be seen with a student of the University was death to her reputation; and this much Cicely knew,—her mother having frequently counselled her to avoid the chance of forming any such acquaintance. Miss Neale's modesty and propriety of feeling—which supplied the place of that more worldly-minded prudence which experience would have furnished—made her hesitate to continue those stealthy meetings which were so constantly exposed to the risk of observation; and she could not possibly receive Hector at her own cottage. Then was it that Hector had recourse to a stratagem which he foresaw would serve a double purpose: namely, that of quieting Cicely's scruples, and in process of time rendering her his victim. We must here state that about three miles further away into the country an elderly woman was temporarily inhabiting a little cottage. This was Mrs. Chicklade, who for some reason which we need not pause to describe, had been compelled to leave London until a storm which threatened her should have blown over. Hardress had seen her in London, and had there availed himself of her services in his libertine pursuits. One day, when riding out into the country in the neighbourhood of Cambridge, he recognised his old metropolitan acquaintance Mrs. Chicklade, in front of the little cottage; and her presence suddenly suggested an idea to relieve him from his bewilderment how to act in future with regard to Cicely Neale. He soon came to an understanding with Mrs. Chicklade; and the plot was put into execution. Cicely was assured by her lover that there was a highly respectable person residing at a suitable distance, at whose cottage and beneath whose auspices they might thenceforth meet. The unsuspecting Miss Neale fell into the snare; and Mrs. Chicklade's habitation became the scene of her future interviews with Hardress. On every occasion when Hector purposed to be there, he wrote to Mrs. Chicklade, who forthwith found an opportunity of communicating

with Cicely;—and thus meeting after meeting took place until the young lady's honour was sacrificed to Hector's passion. Still Cicely was full of faith and confidence in her lover; for he continuously vowed in the most sacred and solemn manner that he would make her his wife so soon as circumstances should permit. After the lapse of a few months the storm which hung over Mrs. Chicklade's head in the metropolis was dispelled; and she returned thither—taking with her, as we have seen, the letters which Hardress had written to her on various occasions, and in which he gave her minute details how to deal with Cicely. Another elderly woman succeeded Mrs. Chicklade in the occupation of the cottage a few miles distant from Cambridge; and there the meetings of Cicely and Hardress were continued, until the latter left the University.

On parting from Cicely, when thus about to enter upon the great world, Hector Hardress renewed all his vehement protestations of undying love and unchangeable fidelity. He represented to her that inasmuch as he was now of age, he was his own master,—and that if he could not obtain the consent of his parents to an alliance with her, he would sooner prove disobedient to their authority than desert or deceive the being whom he loved so well. And Cicely Neale put faith in all he said: she had no reason for supposing that he was all the time deliberately beguiling her. They parted. He wrote occasionally from London, each letter containing some subterfuge or pretext for delaying his marriage—each letter also growing colder and shorter. Vague alarms began to arise in the mind of Cicely Neale: but still she endeavoured to cling with desperate tenacity unto hope: for if she were to loosen her grasp thereon, she felt that she should fall into the abyss of despair. Circumstances however occurred to strengthen her apprehensions, and to give more tangible substance to the misgivings that were forcing themselves upon her mind. Mrs. Chicklade again appeared in the neighbourhood of Cambridge: certain reports relative to her true character, accidentally reached Cicely's ears: she was led to make secret inquiries—and the result was to unveil to her the infamy of the occupation which for many years Mrs. Chicklade had pursued. She gave money to the woman to induce her to leave that neighbourhood; and fortunately for Miss Neale's reputation, the vile woman was always faithful enough in keeping the secrets of those who suffered her to make demands upon their purses. Yet though her eyes were now opened to the iniquity of Mrs. Chicklade's character, Cicely was still far from suspecting that her seduction had all along been a deliberate intention and settled plan on the part of her lover: she thought that he also might in reality have been deceived in respect to the exceeding blackness of that woman's character. Even when his correspondence ceased, and weeks grew into months without bringing another letter from his pen to the anxious and suspenseful Cicely, she did not dare permit herself to think that he had proved a wilful and deliberate betrayer of her peace, her innocence, and her happiness. Finally, as he wrote not—and as he returned not—she resolved to proceed to London, that she might ascertain what were his pursuits, obtain an interview with him,

and endeavour to persuade or compel him to fulfil the solemn pledges he had given her. Besides, even apart from these views and considerations, it became absolutely necessary for Miss Neale to take some decisive step in regard to her own position, inasmuch as the funds which she had found in her deceased mother's desk, and on which (together with a gift from Mrs. Timperley) she had economically subsisted for about three years, were now exhausted. She arrived in the metropolis; and beneath the roof of her uncle and aunt she readily found a home; but she had not been many days in London, when, as the reader has seen, she fell in with Mrs. Chicklade. From this woman she learnt that Hector Hardress was accustomed to call at Sidney Villa; and when Cicely herself proceeded thither she endeavoured to ascertain, when in discourse with the beautiful cousins, whether it were really true, as the vile woman had reported, that Hardress was paying his court to one of them. The result of her visit was a complete conviction that the heart of neither Agnes nor Floribel had been won by her own perfidious lover.

The reader may perhaps marvel how Cicely had adopted so firm and bold a bearing towards Mrs. Chicklade on the occasion when they met in the metropolis. Miss Neale's disposition was peculiar: her character possessed no ordinary degree of strength when circumstances arose to demand the exercise of that vigour. She knew that if she cringed to Mrs. Chicklade—if she exhibited weakness or timidity, she should never be enabled to shake off the hateful incubus: but she had flattered herself that by means of a resolute bearing, the adoption of a tone of defiance, and an appearance as if she cared infinitely less for the vile woman's threats than she in reality did, she would overawe and intimidate instead of being overawed and intimidated herself. Such indeed were her hopes, until she suddenly found them baffled by the display of inveterate malignity and the proclamation of uncompromising hostility which the infamous woman had made during their interview in the lane,—that lane in which Mrs. Chicklade was so soon afterwards found stretched upon the grass, the victim of assassination!

But passing away from that incident—and returning to Cicely Neale, after her visit to Norton Street, and after her interview with Hector Hardress—we must proceed to state that she no longer laboured under the slightest delusion in respect to the past conduct of her seducer. The letters which she had been perusing, revealed unmistakably the fact that Hector's love had never been based upon sincerity, but that it was from the first a gross passion, with a perfidious object. All his vows had been wilful perjuries—all his oaths deliberate blasphemies. The dark iniquity of his proceedings towards her was revealed in all its hideousness: he had never intended to espouse her! Oh, it is a bitter, bitter thing when a woman has to open her eyes to the conviction that she has been but the mere object of a passing amour—the subject of a sensualist's phantasy—the toy of a heartless libertine! And such was the bitterness that now diffused its gall throughout the soul of Cicely Neale.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TWO ENGAGEMENTS.

It was about a fortnight after the incidents which we have been relating, that Charles De Vere called at a somewhat earlier hour than was his wont at Sidney Villa. Indeed it was barely noon when he presented himself at that picturesque abode. Although it was now past the middle of the month of October, yet all the trees and plants in the garden of the villa seemed to be of a freshness and greenness not observable elsewhere: they had taken less of the autumnal tints than the trees and plants in other gardens in the same neighbourhood; while the flowers appeared to enjoy a kindred healthiness and to flourish in their delicacy and beauty to a later period than in other spots. No doubt the skill of the gardener, and the protection of the high boundary-wall which broke the violence of bleak winds, had much—if not everything—to do with the facts just mentioned: but still it seemed most appropriate that the abode of beauty should thus be surrounded by beauty's objects; and a sweet pleasurable superstition might invest the shrubs and flowers of the garden with a charmed existence in compliment to the charms of those lovely beings whose abode was thus embellished.

It was a fine warm day on which Charles De Vere presented himself at an earlier hour than usual at Sidney Villa; and it struck Rachel, as she conducted him into the drawing-room, that there was a peculiar animation on his countenance, as if hope, joy, and pleasure were mingling with suspense. Although he in reality desired only to see one of the young ladies, yet he inquired for both, as in courtesy and propriety bound to do. The answer was precisely that which he had expected: Miss Lister was not as yet visible—but Miss Evelyn would join Mr. De Vere immediately.

Accordingly, in a few minutes Agnes entered the drawing-room; and after the exchange of a few general observations, Charles De Vere began to approach the subject which had brought him thither. He had previously arranged and prepared in his mind how he should introduce it and the terms in which he should explain himself: but he suddenly found that he was in the condition of a schoolboy who goes up to the master's desk with the conviction that he is perfect in his task, but who, when about to commence, discovers that it has all slipped out of his head.

"I am sure, Miss Evelyn," said Charles, "I ought to apologize for intruding at such an early hour in the day—but—but—I had something to communicate—and I thought—that—that—at least I dared flatter myself that you might be sufficiently interested—"

"I do not think from your manner, Mr. De Vere," said Agnes, with a slight fluttering of the heart as if under the influence of a presentiment—but yet she spoke with a modest composure, while the flush which swept over her beautiful countenance was slight and transient—"I do not think from your manner that you can have any disagreeable announcement to make concerning

yourself; and I need hardly say that if it be otherwise, anything which favourably regards your interests can scarcely prove indifferent to me when I recollect the obligations under which I remain towards you."

"A thousand thanks, Miss Evelyn, for this assurance!" exclaimed our hero. "In a word, I am shortly to leave the Home Office—my position will be considerably improved—this morning's post has brought my mother a letter, to the effect that I am appointed junior paid *attaché* to the British Embassy at the Court of Naples."

"I sincerely congratulate you, Mr. De Vere," answered Agnes, "upon this elevation."

"I am to leave London," continued Charles, "immediately after that unfortunate girl's trial shall have taken place: for, as you know, Miss Evelyn, I am unhappily thrown into the position of a principal witness against her."

"I know it," said Agnes, softly and mournfully; "and though you, Mr. De Vere, have been compelled to come forward, as an honourable man, to give your testimony, yet I am confident that in your heart you share in the hope which I entertain, that despite all the fearful combination of circumstances against her, she may be enabled to prove herself innocent."

"Oh, I can assure you, Miss Evelyn," exclaimed the generous-hearted youth, "that it would leave upon my mind a saddening influence for the remainder of my life if that young innocent-looking girl were indeed proved guilty of this dreadful crime! And yet I know not how she can possibly be innocent? But leaving so mournful, so disagreeable a topic for the present,—may I be suffered to approach another?—In a word, Miss Evelyn, the improvement that has taken place in my prospects—the career that is opened for me—the opportunity which I now have of raising myself to wealth, to honour, and distinction—all these circumstances embolden me to make at once that revelation which, if I had continued but a comparatively humble clerk in a Government Office, might have been long deferred."

Again did Agnes experience a certain fluttering at the heart: again did a slight and transient flush pass over her lovely countenance; for with all her innocence, her ingenuousness, and her artlessness, it was impossible that she could escape the influence of that presentiment which told her upon what subject our hero was about to speak.

"The other day, Miss Evelyn," he continued, "after that incident to which I need not more particularly refer, I should have been bold enough to throw myself at your feet and offer you the homage of a heart which truly, faithfully, and devotedly loves you: but I feared that it might seem as if I were presuming on what had then taken place—and therefore I remained silent. But now—"

"Mr. De Vere," interrupted Agnes, in a low tremulous voice, while her heart was fluttering more and more, and the colour went and came in rapid transitions upon her countenance, "I will not for a moment be guilty of such affectation or duplicity as to hint that I feel otherwise than honoured—flattered—"

"Oh! tell me, Agnes, that I may hope—tell me that I am not altogether an object of indifference to you!"—and Charles De Vere threw himself at

her feet, taking her hand, but not daring to press it to his lips.

"No, Mr. De Vere," she tremulously murmured: "you are not an object of indifference to me. Rise, I beseech you!"

"Oh, your words enable me to indulge in every hope!" cried our enthusiastic hero: and the tell-tale blush that was upon the cheeks of Agnes emboldened him to carry her hand to his lips.

That hand was not instantaneously withdrawn; and his heart bounded with joyous hope—for he felt that his love was reciprocated. He rose from his suppliant posture—he placed himself by the side of Agnes—and there was a paradise of rapturous feelings in his soul.

"But tell me," she said,—“tell me, have you spoken to your mother upon this subject?”

"I have, Agnes," he answered, with a noble frankness in the expression of his countenance. "When my mother had ere now communicated the contents of the letter which announced my appointment, I candidly revealed to her the state of my feelings in reference to yourself. The result was her free permission that I should call and make the same avowal to you."

"And yet she does not know me," murmured Agnes: "we have never met."

"Oh! but my mother has heard sufficient of you," exclaimed Charles, "to feel proud at the idea of possessing such a daughter-in-law. She only stipulated that our engagement—if I were happy and fortunate enough to find my fond hopes realized—should continue for a period until my position should be better assured. And, Oh, Agnes! now that I am relieved from all suspense, I can endure to look upon the prospect of separation with but little bitterness; for I shall know that your image will prove the incentive to urge me on in my new career!"

The lovers continued to discourse for some time longer; and when Charles took his departure, it was with joy and rapture in his heart—for he knew that he had not vainly nor hopelessly loved the beautiful Agnes Evelyn.

When our heroine herself had composed her own feelings somewhat, and collected her thoughts, she at once repaired to Floribel,—to whom in the genuine frankness of her nature she communicated what had occurred.

"I congratulate you, my dear cousin," replied Miss Lister, embracing Agnes: "for Charles De Vere has evidently a brilliant career before him. He may some day become an Ambassador—he is sure to be created a Baronet—and perhaps he may rise to a Peerage."

"Of all these things, Floribel, I thought not at the time," answered Agnes: "I thought only of his good qualities—the noble frankness of his character—his generous disposition—his devoted attachment to his mother, of which we have heard."

"And now, my dear Agnes," said Floribel, with a blush upon her cheeks, "I will tell you a little secret of my own. I too have had an offer!"

"Indeed, my dear cousin!" exclaimed Miss Evelyn, in astonishment, "It could not have been to-day—and yet you have not given me your confidence—"

"It was yesterday, Agnes," interrupted Floribel, quickly recovering from the temporary confusion

into which she was thrown. "Somehow or another I did not like to mention it to you—or at least I meant to avail myself of the first fitting opportunity—"

"But not for a moment can I think, my dear Floribel," said Agnes, "that you had any more powerful reason—I mean that you cannot be ashamed—"

"Ashamed?—no!" ejaculated Miss Lister, with a momentary flush of mingled indignation and confusion upon her countenance. "Theodore Clifford is no stranger to you—"

"The Hon. Mr. Clifford?" exclaimed Agnes, in still greater astonishment than before.

"Yes," proceeded Floribel, now speaking firmly, and even peremptorily, as if feeling the necessity of asserting her right to act as she thought fit in her own supposed interests, rather than argue the point at length: "Theodore Clifford yesterday offered me his hand, as he vows that I have long possessed his heart. And permit me to add, Agnes, that I think the son of Lord Windermere is as good a match for me as the young *attaché* can possibly prove for you."

Agnes could not help fancying that there was a certain want of feminine delicacy in the pointed, worldly-minded manner in which her cousin put the subject; and after a few moments' reflection, she asked in a gentle voice, "And do you, my sweet Floribel, really love Mr. Clifford?"

"Oh! I am convinced that I love him!" responded Miss Lister; "for is he not exceedingly handsome? is not his profile purely Grecian? is not his countenance intelligent? are not his manners fascinating?"

"But his father?" suggested Agnes: "has he assented to this alliance?"

Floribel hesitated, looked confused for a few moments, and then said, "Of course it is hardly to be expected that Lord Windermere would blindly give such an assent. His lordship does not know me, and has never seen me: but Theodore assures me that when once we are united, it will be sufficient for him to present me to his father in order that I shall be received with open arms."

"You do not mean me to understand, my dear cousin," said Agnes, with affrighted looks, "that the marriage is to be a clandestine one? No!—you would have never listened to Mr. Clifford if he had ventured to breathe such a proposition to your ear!"

"How strangely you are talking, Agnes!" exclaimed Miss Lister, now adopting an offended air. "It is very natural that Mr. Clifford, seeing how I am courted by several young gentlemen of rank and position, should wish to secure me with the least possible delay. It is natural likewise that I should accept the offer of a patrician's hand—"

"You know that Mr. Clifford," interrupted Agnes, "is the youngest son of Lord Windermere, and that he is entirely dependent on his father's purse? He has no profession—"

"But he is going into the House of Commons at the next election," rejoined Floribel; "and I shall feel both proud and flattered to be introduced to the world as the wife of the Hon. Mr. Clifford, M.P. Besides, although it may sound like vanity, yet to you, my dear cousin, I may confess that I have a sufficiently good opinion of myself as to

feel confident that Lord Windermere will not consider that he is disgraced in his daughter-in-law. In a word, Agnes, the bridal will soon take place—quite privately, you know—but you can act as the bridemaid——”

“Good heavens, Floribel!” exclaimed Miss Evelyn, with renewed consternation, affright, and grief; “is it possible that you have gone to such lengths with Mr. Clifford?”

“This is unkind!” said Floribel, now having recourse to weeping. “I did not a few minutes back remonstrate with you—I congratulated you——”

“Your own heart told you, Floribel,” said Agnes, gently yet firmly, “that there was nothing precipitate, indiscreet, or imprudent in my conduct—no intended violation of the obedience due to a parent—nothing secret nor clandestine. Oh, my dear cousin! it grieves me profoundly—it pains me poignantly, to be compelled to address you in such terms!—but never, never can I consent to assist in any way in a proceeding which inspires no confidence, and which I fear is not calculated to insure your happiness!”

“Then we will say nothing more upon the subject, Agnes,” exclaimed Floribel, now really indignant without the slightest affectation of anger. “It is too bad that you should take me thus to task, as if you were older than I—whereas if age gave any rights, they would belong to me, for I am a few weeks older than you.”

Agnes endeavoured to pacify Floribel—to reason with her calmly and gently—to make her comprehend that she was precipitately taking a step on which depended the remainder of her life’s happiness: but Floribel shut herself up in a sort of sullen reserve. Perhaps in her own heart she recognised all the truthfulness of her cousin’s observations—all the justice of her remonstrances: but she was infatuated and self-willed—she was bent upon pursuing a particular course—her vanity was flattered—her ambition received the promise of being gratified—and she would not retract. At length Agnes felt the necessity of speaking so firmly that Floribel began to fear lest her cousin should actually take steps to break off the intended marriage—such as for instance by communicating with Lord Windermere. She grew frightened: she threw off her sullenness and reserve; she embraced Agnes, and promised to reflect awhile ere she committed herself by any further pledges or promises to Theodore Clifford.

Miss Evelyn—being herself all guileless and artlessness—could not for a moment imagine that her cousin was deceiving her: she was therefore rejoiced at the intention which Floribel now proclaimed; and fervidly returning her embrace, she murmured, with tears upon her cheeks, “I felt sure you would not act rashly upon the point.”

Miss Lister answered in a manner that was akin to the duplicity of the tactics she was now adopting; and Agnes was completely deceived. The well-principled young lady’s mind felt as if a considerable weight had been lifted off it; and temporarily leaving Floribel, she repaired to Belmont Cottage, to form the acquaintance of Mrs. De Vere, according to an arrangement which she had made with Charles.

We will here interrupt the thread of our narrative for a few moments in order to explain how

Mrs. De Vere had been induced to give her consent to an engagement between her son and Miss Evelyn. For certain reasons of her own, she had hitherto abstained from forming any acquaintances in the neighbourhood: indeed it had been altogether against her own wish that she ever came to reside in the vicinity of London at all. But in this she yielded to superior influences; and when Charles revealed to her his love for Miss Evelyn, she felt that it would be useless as well as unwise—whatsoever her own private feelings might be—to attempt to thwart a passion against which she could openly advance no argument. She purposed to accompany her son to Italy; and she therefore saw that if she were now to form Miss Evelyn’s acquaintance, it would not necessarily lead her any further into a circle of society in her own neighbourhood. Besides, the plea of ill-health could not be advanced against the reception of one for whom her son had conceived so strong an attachment; and thus her assent to receive Miss Evelyn was but a natural consequence to that other assent which she could not possibly refuse—namely, that Charles might declare his love to Agnes.

Miss Evelyn paid the visit to Belmont Cottage, where she remained for upwards of an hour in conversation with Mrs. De Vere, of whom she formed a very favourable opinion. And such, it would seem, was the impression that she made upon the mind of that lady herself; for Mrs. De Vere frequently contemplated Agnes with an air of deep, mournful, and tender interest during this visit.

Not long after Agnes left home to call on Mrs. De Vere, the Hon. Mr. Clifford arrived at the Villa. He was quickly joined by Floribel in the drawing-room. We have already spoken of him as a handsome, dark-haired young gentleman, of about three-and-twenty, with luxuriant whiskers and a Grecian profile. His countenance was intelligent; his manners were peculiarly fascinating; his figure was good; and he dressed with very excellent taste. In respect to his disposition and character, the reader will glean the fullest details during the progress of our story.

The moment Floribel made her appearance in the drawing-room, to which Mr. Clifford had been shown, he hastened forward, took her hand, and pressed it to his lips. They sat down together; and as he still retained that fair hand in his own, he said, “Have you yet spoken, dearest Floribel, to your cousin?”

“I have,” answered the young lady, the colour rising to her cheeks: “and I am afraid that she will never give her consent——”

“You speak, my beloved Floribel,” interrupted Theodore, “as if you were alluding to an elder sister or to some other relative having a right to dictate and coerce.”

“When I used the word *consent*, Theodore,” rejoined Miss Lister, “I intended to convey the idea that——But no matter! In short, Agnes believes that I am taking time to reflect and to consider.”

“And do you, my sweet Floribel,” asked Clifford, with a somewhat reproachful look, yet one that was full of tenderness, “require time for such reflection and for such consideration? Do



you not place implicit reliance upon me?—have you not every faith in my love—my honour—my sincerity?"

"Yes, dear Theodore—yes! every faith!" answered the young lady. "Oh, I am sure that you love me!—and you know that I love you in return! Tell me that you love me, Theodore?"

"Devotedly!"—and Theodore Clifford, winding his arms round the beautiful Floribel's waist, strained her to his breast, covering her lips and cheeks with kisses so impassioned—so fervid, that, filled with confusion, she at length gently disengaged herself from him.

"And you will consent, dearest Floribel," he said, in a tone of tender entreaty, "to become mine—mine without delay? Oh! as years shall I esteem the minutes which are yet to elapse ere you can become indissolubly mine! But why should our happiness be delayed? If your cousin Miss Evelyn, with an extreme of cautiousness that

almost amounts to the injuriousness of suspicion, should bid you reflect and deliberate, rest assured that she will never view with pleasure the alliance that your own heart prompts you to form! If therefore our union must for every reason take place stealthily and privately, may it not as well be solemnized to-morrow as a week, or a month, or a year hence? Oh, dearest Floribel! consent to make me happy with the least possible delay—and all the most devoted love which men can show for women shall be testified by me towards you!"

In this manner did Theodore Clifford continue to plead; and Floribel yielded to his supplication. She consented to elope with him, if he could so arrange all the details of the proceeding that Agnes should not suspect her design until it was too late for her to take any measure to prevent it. With flushing cheeks, with eyes swimming in mingled tenderness and confusion, and with palpitating bosom, did Floribel thus intremulous whispers

signify to Theodore Clifford that she yielded to his applications. A lover is always ready-witted in triumphing over difficulties; and perhaps Theodore had been revolving certain plans in his mind before he called at the villa on the present occasion: perhaps he had foreseen that Agnes would raise obstacles;—perhaps likewise he did not altogether regret that she had done so, inasmuch as from that circumstance he was enabled to propose to Floribel a stealthy and secret departure. He assured her that every arrangement should be conducted with the utmost circumspection—that he would lose no time in procuring a special license—that they would journey to some secluded village where the marriage could be solemnized—and that immediately on their return to London, he would lead her into his father's presence, they would throw themselves upon their knees before Lord Windermere, and his lordship's forgiveness of his son would be accompanied by the acknowledgment of his daughter-in-law.

Floribel listened to all these assurances, which more than ever convinced her of the honourable character and devoted love of her admirer: but still there was one difficulty to get over. How could she leave the villa unperceived by Agnes? They deliberated for some little time; and at length a plan was arranged. Theodore Clifford then again embraced Floribel fervently: and he took his departure to carry out the arrangements which had been settled between them.

At a distance of about half a mile from Sidney Villa, and in the neighbourhood of Kentish Town, resided a widow-lady named Sheridan, who was accustomed to visit at Mr. and Mrs. Timperley's. There Agnes and Floribel had formed her acquaintance: she occasionally called at the villa; but inasmuch as she was frivolous in her conversation, affected in her manners, and prone to gossiping, she was no favourite with Miss Evelyn. Floribel however had rather taken a fancy to her,—considering her to be an agreeable and entertaining person. It happened that on the very day of which we are writing, Mrs. Sheridan had sent a note, inviting Miss Lister and Miss Evelyn to take tea with her in the evening: but Agnes had signified her intention to decline the invitation, while something had prevented Floribel from expressing at the moment any decision upon the point. She now resolved to accept that invitation; and the instant Theodore had taken his departure she sent a note to this effect to Mrs. Sheridan.

When Agnes returned from her visit to Mrs. De Vere, Floribel informed her that the Hon. Mr. Clifford had called,—adding, “But I can assure you, my dear cousin, that I was not unmindful of the promise I had previously given to you.”

Miss Evelyn expressed her delight at what she considered to be Floribel's prudence and good sense; and not for an instant did she suspect that she was being deceived by her cousin. She stated how she had passed a very agreeable hour with Mrs. De Vere, whom she represented as an amiable, mild, lady-like person;—and after some little conversation in this strain, Agnes betook herself to her embroidery.

“Oh, I forgot to mention,” said Floribel, while half-reclining on a sofa, with a novel in her hand, “that I wrote just now to Mrs. Sheridan, to the

effect that I would pass an hour or two with her in the evening, and making some suitable excuse for your inability to accept the invitation.”

“If I had thought that you really desired to accept it, Floribel,” answered Agnes, “I would have gone with you. But now it would seem capricious on my part——”

“Oh! I have no particular wish,” exclaimed Miss Lister: “only I fear that it would seem strange, as Mrs. Sheridan has on two or three occasions invited us—and we have always refused hitherto.”

“Go then, my dear cousin,” said the unsuspecting Agnes: and she thought to herself that a little recreation would have a beneficial effect for Floribel after what had passed in reference to Theodore Clifford.

It was shortly after eight o'clock in the evening that Floribel entered a fly, or hackney-vehicle, which had been engaged to take her to Mrs. Sheridan's. She felt a tightening at the heart as she took leave of Agnes; and she could scarcely prevent herself from embracing her beautiful cousin with a degree of fervour which might have raised a suspicion that the leave-taking was felt to be one which would prove of longer duration than a mere two or three hours. But Floribel thought to herself that she had gone too far to retreat; and having therefore to play a particular part, she succeeded in veiling whatsoever emotions she felt on the occasion. She went:—and the unsuspecting Agnes remained alone in the drawing-room at Sidney Villa.

As the vehicle was rolling along, Floribel felt that the tears were trickling down her cheeks. She hastily wiped them away, and strove to persuade herself that she was foolish to yield to this weakness—that she was only consulting her own happiness in the step which she was taking—and that when once, as the honoured bride of Theodore Clifford, she should be received by Lord Windermere, she would have every reason to rejoice at the courage, firmness, and decision which she was manifesting now. As for the duplicity of which she was guilty towards Agnes, she felt assured that her amiable cousin would cheerfully pardon her, and on her return to London would speed to welcome her as the bride of Theodore Clifford. Still she could not help feeling a sensation of grief, which for a moment had bordered on anguish, at thus voluntarily separating herself from that cousin with whom she had been brought up since her earliest infancy, from whom she had never before been parted, and whom she really loved with a sisterly fondness. Therefore, under all these conflicting influences, it was with some difficulty that Floribel could compose her feelings and smooth her countenance by the time she reached Mrs. Sheridan's house in the vicinity of Kentish Town.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ELOPEMENT.

It was only a very small party which Mrs. Sheridan gave on this occasion,—just, as she expressed it, a few of her neighbours dropping in to

see her quite in a friendly way, without formality or ceremony. She was a well-meaning woman enough: her weaknesses did not amount to vices; and she would not for a moment have become an accomplice in the meditated elopement. Her invitation had therefore been made a convenience of, as the reader has seen, to forward the plans settled between Floribel Lister and Theodore Clifford.

There were about a dozen guests at Mrs. Sheridan's house: four old people sat down to whist: the more juvenile portion of the company recreated themselves with music. Floribel seemed more than usually gay: her spirits were partially forred, and partially borne up with the bright hopes in which she was cradling herself. Whenever for a moment a sensation of remorse on account of her duplicity to Agnes, or of regretful emotion at having separated herself from that much-loved cousin, crept into Floribel's heart, she took refuge in merry-sounding laughter; she flew to the piano to play a cheerful air; or she started some gay and joyous topic of discourse. Every one present thought that Miss Lister had never before proved herself so amiable, and had never seemed in better spirits.

There was an or-molu timepiece upon the mantel in Mrs. Sheridan's drawing room; and as the hands drew nearer and nearer towards the indication of the hour of eleven, Floribel's heart fluttered more and more—she had all the greater difficulty in concealing her real agitation beneath a semblance of outward natural gaiety. The timepiece struck the hour;—and then Floribel, watching an opportunity when the whist players were deep in their game, and the rest of the company were gathered about a young lady at the piano—glided unperceived from the room. The domestics were employed in laying the supper-table:—of this Floribel assured herself—she caught up her veil and scarf in the breakfast-parlour, where she had left those articles—and unperceived by a soul, she passed out into the garden at the back of the house. This she threaded; and in a few moments reached a gate opening into a lane, where a post-chaise was waiting, and where Theodore Clifford was in readiness to receive her. At that instant a severe pang shot through the heart of Floribel: it was almost a sense of consternation which seized upon her brain; and if the hand of any guardian genius had been stretched forth to hold her back, she would have yielded to the friendly intervention. And if, too, there had been a saving voice to whisper a single syllable of warning in her ear, she would not have remained deaf to it. It required at that moment but the weight of a straw thrown into the balance, to induce that young girl—hitherto rash, self-willed, and willfully self-blinding also—to retract all that she had been resolved to accomplish!

But no guardian hand was there—no saving voice mingled with the breeze which was whispering along the lane and ruffling the autumn-tinted foliage of the trees. One last look did Floribel fling behind towards the house which she had thus so stealthily quitted,—a look in which there was a momentary expression of anguished entreaty, as if imploring that some one would even yet come forth thence to save her. But the next moment she was inside the chaise, clasped in the arms of her handsome lover; and then in the rapturous

feelings which took possession of her soul, all remorse and all regret were forgotten!

Rapid and varied however were the transitions of feeling which Floribel was doomed to experience;—and this indeed is ever the case with those who are taking a step that hovers in doubt betwixt the approval or disapproval of their own consciences. A moment before, while she stood upon the steps leading down from that garden-gate, she would have consented to be saved if any one had been there to save her:—another moment, and she experienced feelings of soft ecstatic rapture when clasped in the arms of her lover:—then, yet another moment, and a strong revulsion of feeling took place within her. Her soul received a sudden shock as the thought flashed to her mind that she was alone in that chaise with Theodore Clifford.

"Where is the maid whom you promised to have in attendance for me?" she softly and tremulously inquired, with scarcely courage to put a question which might seem to imply distrust of her lover—and yet on the other hand impelled by delicacy of feeling to put it.

"You know not, dearest Floribel," answered Theodore, "how distressed I am at this disappointment. But believe me, it is not my fault! An elderly lady-friend of mine faithfully promised to supply the requirement: but at the last moment the girl whom I expected made not her appearance. I was bewildered how to act—But heavens, Floribel! you are weeping!"

And so it was. Again had the sense of her imprudent conduct returned to Floribel's mind: the tears were trickling down her cheeks—they were glistening in the light which was shed by moon and stars into the vehicle.

"Oh, Theodore!" she murmured, her voice broken by sobs; "what must you think of me that I consent thus to travel with you—alone?"

"If you had refused, Floribel," he at once answered, with some little degree of vehemence, "I should have fancied that you had no trust nor confidence in me; and I should have considered therefore that for some reason I was held unworthy to become your husband."

"Oh, I indeed feel that there ought to be every confidence between us!" exclaimed Floribel, wiping away her tears—for an instant smiling softly and tenderly upon her lover—and then casting down her looks beneath the luminous earnestness of his own.

He passed his arm round her waist—drew her towards him—and covered her cheeks with kisses, until those cheeks glowed with burning blushes, and she felt that there was a fervour of passion in his embraces which made her tremble and shrink away from them. For be it remembered that Floribel was strictly chaste in her virgin thoughts: no gross ideas had ever entered her imagination; and though naturally of a warm temperament, yet the unimpaired purity of her soul would have been proof against the wiles of deliberate seduction, while it would also have shielded her from any attempt to surprise her virtue in a moment of seeming weakness. Giddy and thoughtless she was—self-willed and rash, as the reader has seen—too much prone to regard superficial or ephemeral circumstances as the elements of happiness—too confiding in her disposition—too indolent to reason

deliberately when it was for her good, and yet on the other hand too ready to conjure up a thousand arguments in support of any project whereon she had set her mind. Thus, though her character was without strong moral stamina, she was purely virtuous: her innate sense of modesty was not marred by the element of levity that was in her disposition;—and so she trembled and vague fears sprang up in her mind, as she felt that there was something more horrid, more passionate in the kisses which Theodore imprinted upon her cheeks than was completely consistent with the chastity and purity of love.

Clifford saw that he had shocked and frightened his beautiful companion; and he hastened to efface the impression which his passionate fervour had thus made upon her mind. He spoke to her in the softest and tenderest manner: in the most delicate terms did he assure her of his affection: he expatiated on the happiness they would enjoy when united beyond the power of any human law to separate them; and thus in a few minutes Floribel was completely reassured:—she was likewise completely happy. It was sweet for her to listen to this tender language: she had sufficient vanity to be flattered by the compliments, which, delicately and without fulsomeness, Clifford interwove with his protestations of imperishable affection and with his expatiations upon their prospects of happiness. Again were all remorse and regret forgotten: Agnes was only remembered as one who in a few days would be happy to welcome her cousin as the bride of Theodore Clifford; and when he again kissed her cheek, she felt neither shocked nor frightened—she trembled not, neither did she immediately withdraw from his embrace—because now there was no passionate fervour in those kisses: they seemed to be but the chaste testimonials of a pure, manly, and honourable love.

The post-chaise proceeded at a rapid rate: the first stage was soon accomplished—the horses were changed—and away sped the equipage again. It was a little past one o'clock in the morning when the second stage was accomplished, and a small town was reached. The night was frosty; and at this hour the chill set in with bitterness. Clifford gently suggested that it would be well if his beloved were to take a few hours' rest at the place which they had thus reached,—adding that they could pursue their way at eight o'clock towards the village where he proposed that the ceremony should be solemnized, and where he promised that they should arrive before mid-day. Floribel, now all confidence, expressed her willingness to leave every arrangement to her lover; and moreover she felt the bitterness of the chill—for she was but lightly clad, and though his cloak was wrapped around her, she had no warm furs to protect her.

A halt was accordingly resolved upon at the inn where the post-chaise now drew up. All the inmates had retired to rest: but a chambermaid was speedily summoned from her room; and she signified her readiness to attend to the requirements of the travellers. Clifford intimated that they needed two rooms; and he asked whether it were possible to have any warm negus supplied at that hour?—observing that both himself and his companion were well-nigh perished with the cold. The chambermaid conducted them into a parlour,

where there happened to be a remnant of fire in the grate; and she promised that all their wants should be quickly attended to. In a few minutes she returned, bearing a tray containing wine in a decanter, hot water, sugar, and all that was requisite for making the negus that had been ordered. Clifford displayed the most delicate attentions towards Floribel,—conducting himself, alike in speech and in looks, in a manner calculated to maintain all the confidence with which he had succeeded in inspiring her;—and that confidence was complete.

"You must have suffered much from the cold night air, my sweetest Floribel," he said; "for I myself felt its bitterness. It must be many hours since you partook of any refreshment—and this negus will warm you."

While thus speaking, Clifford was standing at the table mixing the beverage; while Floribel sat cowering over the remnant of fire in the grate. She did indeed feel bitterly cold; and she could scarcely keep her teeth from chattering. Clifford approached her with the steaming glass in his hand, and he delicately pressed her to partake of its contents. She did so—but drinking merely a portion of the negus; for she was naturally most abstemious in respect to any except the weakest beverages. The chambermaid soon returned to intimate that the rooms were now prepared for the reception of the travellers: Theodore respectfully wished Floribel good night,—simply pressing her hand, and not offering to embrace her in the presence of the domestic.

The young lady followed the chambermaid to the room prepared for her reception. The domestic had considerably lighted the fire, which was now blazing and sparkling in a manner to diffuse an air of cheerfulness about the room. The maid retired; and Floribel used all possible despatch in disappalling herself; for she felt drowsy—which she attributed to the numbing influence of the cold. She sought the couch; and not many moments had her head rested upon the pillow, when she sank into a profound slumber.

We must now return to Sidney Villa. The beautiful Agnes occupied herself with her embroidery and her books after Floribel had taken her departure to proceed to Mrs. Sheridan's house; and thus engaged, our interesting young heroine whiled away the time until past eleven o'clock. She then began to think that the party at Mrs. Sheridan's must be a more agreeable one than Floribel had expected to find it—or else her cousin would assuredly not have remained so late. Time passed: it was now midnight; and still no Floribel! Agnes thought of retiring to rest: but she lingered in the drawing-room, saying to herself, "She cannot be many minutes now."

Another hour elapsed: it was one in the morning—and still Floribel came not. The pure-minded Agnes was very far from entertaining the slightest suspicion of the real truth: her former idea that her cousin had found the party an agreeable one, was confirmed by her continued absence; and Agnes said to herself, "The supper is perhaps late; and as Floribel is a general favourite in society, Mrs. Sheridan and the guests will not suffer her to depart. But she cannot possibly be long now!"

Having sat up till this hour, Agnes thought that she might just as well remain until her cousin's return: but as the hands of the time-piece on the mantel drew nearer and nearer towards the announcement of two o'clock, our young heroine began to grow uneasy. Rachel, who was also sitting up, entered the drawing-room on some pretext, but in reality to ascertain if Miss Evelyn were prepared for this protracted absence on her cousin's part. Agnes however merely intimated her belief that Miss Lister could not be many minutes longer ere she returned; and Rachel withdrew.

Still time passed on without the appearance of Floribel; and now, as it was nearly three o'clock in the morning, the uneasiness of Agnes was enhanced into positive alarm. She summoned Rachel, and expressed her wonder that her cousin had not returned,—adding, “Miss Lister led me to believe that she should be home early. I am really afraid something must have happened—though I can scarcely conceive how this could be the case and no message from Mrs. Sheridan to that effect.”

Rachel at once volunteered to proceed to Mrs. Sheridan's residence, which was only about half a mile distant from Sidney Villa; and Agnes thankfully accepted the offer. Away went Rachel; and during the twenty minutes that her absence lasted, Agnes endeavoured to reason with herself against the vague fears that were creeping over her—but she could not subdue her uneasiness. Rachel returned with consternation and dismay upon her countenance. The party at Mrs. Sheridan's had broken up at one o'clock; but Miss Lister had suddenly disappeared at eleven. Mrs. Sheridan and her guests were alike astonished and hurt at that abrupt departure, which was all the more unaccountable inasmuch as Miss Lister had not availed herself of the hackney-vehicle which had returned to bear her home. Indeed, Mrs. Sheridan could only conjecture that Miss Lister had taken a sudden offence at something, although the hostess was utterly unaware of having given cause for such displeasure. All these particulars Rachel had learnt from Mrs. Sheridan's parlour-maid, who had risen from her bed to answer the good woman's summons at the door.

Agnes listened with affright and dismay to these communications. At first she was so bewildered she knew not what to think: she burst into tears, and experienced a grief which seemed to be utterly inconsolable. At length a faint suspicion—yet vague and uncertain as the sound of far-distant bells in the ear—began to steal into our heroine's mind. She repelled it—or rather she endeavoured to do so: but it returned and grew stronger. Was it possible that Floribel could have voluntarily absented herself? Yes!—all circumstances combined to force upon Agnes the conviction that such had been the case. It was but too evident that her cousin had stealthily glided away from Mrs. Sheridan's house: she had not therefore been carried off by force. But for what purpose could she have so absented herself? Oh! was it on account of the remonstrances which Agnes had addressed to her, with such well-meant earnestness, against a rash and precipitate union with Theodore Clifford? Our unhappy heroine feared that she now saw it all!

Rachel—who was deeply attached to both the young ladies—was also weeping; and she anxiously watched Miss Evelyn's countenance to discover what was passing in her thoughts. But Agnes would not as yet explain herself thoroughly to this domestic, for fear lest by any accident the mystery should receive a different solution—in which case she knew that she would feel sorry for having breathed aught prejudicial to the cousin whom she so dearly loved. She retired to her chamber, where she gave way to the grief that filled her soul.

As early as nine o'clock in the morning, Mrs. Sheridan presented herself at Sidney Villa; and Agnes at once received her. That lady, on hearing from her parlour-maid of Rachel's visit to her house long after the party had broken up, had instituted inquiries; and from a police-constable she learnt that precisely at eleven o'clock on the preceding night, a post-chaise had stopped in the lane at the back-gate of the garden. The constable, having been led by curiosity to watch from a little distance, had seen a lady issue forth from that gate: she was received by a gentleman in a cloak and travelling cap: he handed her into the chaise, which at once drove away in a northerly direction. The tale seemed to be confirmed by the fact that the bolts by which the garden-door of Mrs. Sheridan's premises was secured, were found that morning to have been drawn back. The policeman, we should add, was at too great a distance to observe the countenances of the gentleman and lady to whom he alluded; but so far as the few details of his description went in respect to their stature and figure, there could be little doubt that the one was Floribel and the other Theodore Clifford.

The suspicions of Agnes were thus fully confirmed; and though overwhelmed with grief on account of the imprudence of the step which her cousin had taken, she nevertheless felt assured that the elopement was for the purpose of immediate marriage. For the sake of Floribel's reputation, she therefore at once assured Mrs. Sheridan that such was the fact,—at the same time mentioning the name of the Hon. Mr. Clifford as that of the individual with whom her cousin had unquestionably eloped. Mrs. Sheridan took her departure; and then Agnes proceeded to reveal to Rachel all that she had hitherto suppressed. This worthy woman was of course afflicted to think that Miss Lister should have deemed it requisite to take such an extraordinary step, when by the free exercise of her own will she might have set Miss Evelyn's remonstrances at naught: but still she had too high an opinion of Floribel's good principles to fancy for a moment that the elopement had any other object than that of marriage.

Poor Agnes knew not what course to adopt. She felt so uneasy, wretched, and afflicted that it seemed as if she *must* do something—but she was bewildered by her own thoughts. If she could only find the slightest clue to the track which Floribel and Theodore Clifford had taken, she would speed after them—she would not allow her cousin to proceed to the altar without at least being accompanied by herself. But that clue was utterly wanting; for though the post-chaise had departed from Mrs. Sheridan's gate in a northerly direction, how could conjecture hit upon the pre-

cise road which it had taken? or how could inquiries be instituted upon such a point? Agnes therefore came to the conclusion that there was really nothing to be done in the matter, and that she must endeavour to remain quiet until she received some tidings of her cousin. She thought to herself that Floribel would not be so cruel as to leave her very long in suspense, and that she would be certain to write immediately after the ceremony should have made her an honourably wedded wife.

The rumour soon spread in the neighbourhood that Miss Lister had eloped with some gentleman belonging to a high patrician family; and the report failed not to reach Belmont Cottage at an early hour. Charles was profoundly afflicted—for he knew full well that his beloved Agnes would be overwhelmed with grief. His first impulse was to speed to Sidney Villa and proffer his consolations; but Mrs. De Vere represented that it would be more consistent with delicacy and propriety of feeling if she herself were to call upon Miss Evelyn in the first instance. Charles assented; and Mrs. De Vere proceeded to Sidney Villa. Agnes had however shut herself up in her chamber, having given strict injunctions to Rachel to deny her to everybody—her determination being to receive no visitors, and to avoid all conversation upon the painful subject until she should be in a position to proclaim that her cousin had become the wife of the gentleman with whom she had taken her departure. Subsequently, however, when she heard that Mrs. De Vere had called, she felt sorry she had not proved accessible to that lady, considering the nature of the engagement which subsisted between herself and Charles. She therefore wrote a note to Mrs. De Vere, apologising for not having seen her, and hoping to have that satisfaction on the morrow.

In the afternoon Cicely Neale called at Sidney Villa. To her likewise did Rachel explain that her young mistress was too much distressed to see any one; but Cicely declared that she could not think of abandoning her friend to the painful companionship of her own thoughts. Rachel accordingly took it upon herself to introduce Miss Neale into the presence of Agnes; and the latter was glad that her dependant had in this instance disobeyed her instructions. Cicely said as much as she could to comfort Agnes: but she was careful not to encourage too much hope that everything would terminate in a manner to dispel much of Miss Evelyn's grief in respect to her cousin; for Cicely had strong misgivings in her own mind relative to the purity of Mr. Clifford's intentions. Not that she had any positive reason for suspecting that gentleman, with whom she was indeed totally unacquainted; but her own sad experiences had taught her to think lightly of patrician honour when a too confiding female was concerned.

"I can assure you, my dear Agnes," said Cicely, "that my uncle and aunt were much distressed when the intelligence reached Lincoln's Inn Fields just now. You must permit me to remain with you for a day or two. I cannot think of leaving you altogether alone under such painful circumstances;—and if you will consent to receive me as a companion and treat me as a friend—"

Agnes interrupted the speech by throwing her

self weeping into Miss Neale's arms: she did indeed now experience the want of a companion and of a friend; and she therefore gratefully assented to Cicely's proposal.

It was about eleven o'clock at night when the two young ladies separated, to retire to their chambers. An apartment adjoining the one which Agnes occupied, had been prepared for Cicely; but upon being conducted thither, she made no immediate preparation to seek her couch. On the contrary, the instant she found herself alone, her proceedings were of a strange and singular character. Having evidently from the first made up her mind to pass a day or two at Sidney Villa, she had ordered a box containing changes of apparel and the requisites of the toilet, to be sent by a carrier; and this box had arrived in the course of the evening. She now opened it; and from amongst the dresses which it contained, she drew forth a pair of pistols. These she deliberately began to load; and when the task was accomplished she looked at her watch. It was then half-past eleven o'clock.

"At midnight it is to happen!" she muttered to herself: and a singular expression of mingled rage, distress, and firm resolution passed over her countenance.

She now extinguished the tapers; and without disappalling herself, or making the slightest preparation for rest, she sat down in the dark, and soon fell into a profound reverie. But we must leave her for the present, and direct the attention of the reader to certain incidents that were passing elsewhere.

A few minutes before midnight a postchaise drew up at a little distance from the boundary-wall belonging to the garden of Sidney Villa; and two persons alighted. One of them bade the postilion make a little circuit in the neighbourhood, for fear lest the circumstance of such an equipage stopping there should attract the attention of any belated persons returning to their homes. The postilion was further directed to be at the iron gate of Sidney Villa in about a quarter of an hour's time. The chaise accordingly rolled away; and the two individuals who had alighted from it, proceeded to the gate which has just been alluded to. This was locked, as those persons indeed expected to find it; but having satisfied themselves that no observer was nigh, they at once sealed it.

Without maintaining any further mystery on the point, we may as well at once inform our readers that these persons were Hector Hardress and his valet.

The latter was a man of about five-and-thirty years of age—thoroughly unprincipled—fond of money—and ready to do anything to obtain it. His name was Luke Corbet; and he had been for about a twelvemonth in the service of his present master.

"Now, Luke," said Hector, so soon as they were within the garden belonging to Sidney Villa, "you thoroughly understand all that we have to do?"

"Everything, sir," was the man's ready response. "It is not a very difficult matter to carry off a young lady, provided you can prevent her from screaming in such a way as to alarm the household."

"There will be no fear of that," rejoined Hec-

tor,—“thanks to the discovery of chloroform! But remember, if we happen to meet any one of the servants—”

“I will grapple her at once,” answered Luke; “and trust to me, sir, that not a word shall issue from her lips provided that you will be prompt in applying the handkerchief with that stuff you speak of to the nostrils, so as to quiet her altogether.”

“All our proceedings,” rejoined Hardress, “shall be conducted with promptitude and energy. You have your mask about you?” he added, taking one from his own pocket and adjusting it upon his countenance.

The example was immediately followed by Luke Corbet; so that master and man, with those black vizards, had the air of burglars. The precaution of concealing their faces had been suggested by Hardress in case they should have to deal with any of the domestics of Sidney Villa,—his object being to involve in as much mystery as possible the authorship of the bold outrage which he contemplated.

The diabolic plan which he had formed, may be briefly explained. His purpose was to carry off Agnes Evelyn to a secluded house which he had hired some ten or a dozen miles distant, and where he resolved that her honour should be sacrificed to his passion. He calculated that when once she found that his triumph and her own disgrace were accomplished, she would of necessity accept the position of his mistress, and that no disagreeable consequences would result from the villanous outrage by which it was intended to make her his victim. Hector Hardress had been for the last few days hatching this plot in concert with his valet Luke Corbet: and when in the course of the day which had just passed, the intelligence reached him of Floribel's elopement, fortune appeared to be favouring his nefarious scheme by the removal of one whose presence in the villa had previously appeared to constitute no mean difficulty, inasmuch as Hector knew, or at least believed, that the cousins occupied the same chamber.

Having adjusted the masks upon their faces, Hector and his valet approached the villa. In one front room only was a light to be discerned; and this was glimmering through the curtains which were closed within the casement of that chamber. Hardress had no doubt that this was the room in which his intended victim slept; and he instantaneously comprehended its position in reference to the staircase, which he hoped very shortly to ascend. Passing round to the rear of the premises, he and his valet at once commenced their operations; for Hardress was well acquainted with all the arrangements and details of the establishment, alike from a knowledge of the interior as from observation made in respect to the exterior in those times when he was accustomed to call at the house and had walked in the garden with the young ladies. There was a glass-door which had a shutter fixed up within. A glazier's diamond, with which the valet was provided, speedily and noiselessly cut out one of the squares of glass; and a small centre-bit, plied dexterously, soon made a hole sufficiently large for the introduction of a hand. The screw which retained the shutter was now quickly removed by taking off the nut

fastening it on the inner side. Then the shutter was cautiously lowered; and the extraction of another pane of glass enabled Hector to introduce his hand and unlock the door. If the key had not been found in the lock—or if there should have happened to be bolts which could not be reached from the outside—the alternative would have been to cut away a sufficiency of the glass framework to admit a human form; and for all these eventualities the valet was provided with the requisite implements. But the key *did* happen to be in the lock; and no bolts proved to be fastened.

The entry into the house was thus effected: Hardress and the valet found themselves in a passage communicating direct with the hall. A complete silence reigned throughout the villa; and treading with the utmost caution, they advanced towards the staircase. This they ascended; and they gained the landing communicating with the principal chambers. But now a chance had to be encountered against which at the outset it was scarcely possible to provide, and which therefore had to be left to the chapter of accidents. It was whether the door of Agnes' room should be found locked or unlocked. On this chance Hardress knew full well depended the success or failure of his nefarious project.

Noiselessly, on tiptoe, did Hector advance to the door of that chamber where the glimmering light had been seen through the curtained windows from the outside. He grasped the handle—he turned it with the utmost caution—his heart leapt with a criminal exultation as the door yielded to his touch. Slowly he opened it sufficiently to listen: all was silent within. A little further he opened it, so as to be enabled to look into the room; and at the same time his hand clutched a kerchief which was strongly impregnated with chloroform. Agnes was wrapped in a profound slumber. The light which was burning on the toilet-table, played upon one side of her countenance, thus revealing with a Rembrandt effect the regularly formed and beautiful profile. The luxuriant masses of the golden auburn hair lay floatingly over the pillow: one fair arm was beneath her head—the other reposed, softly curved, upon the counterpane. It was the slumber of angelic innocence in which she was steeped: a halo of purity and chastity appeared to surround her; and yet the better feelings of the profligate patrician were not touched by the spectacle:—on the contrary, his evil passions were all the more powerfully excited.

He was advancing on tiptoe towards the couch, when all of a sudden Luke Corbet kicked his foot against some piece of furniture as he was following his master; and Agnes started up in affright. Terror and consternation however sealed her lips long enough to enable Hector Hardress to reach the side of the couch; and the kerchief which he clutched in his hand was thrust into the young lady's face at the very instant when a cry for assistance was about to peal forth from her tongue. She sank back upon the pillow in a state of unconsciousness; and it was all the work of a moment from the time that her eyes opened until they thus closed again. But just as Hector Hardress was on the very point of winding his arms around her form to lift her from the couch, an ejaculation burst from his valet, Luke Corbet; and on look-

ing round, he beheld another person upon the scene.

This was Cicely Neale, with a pistol in each hand. Her countenance was pale—but it expressed the firmest decision, mingled with indignation—almost with rage. Hector, who had little expected to find the victim of his seduction beneath that roof, was transfixed to the spot; and through the eyeholes of his mask his looks were riveted in confusion, bewilderment, and dismay upon Cicely Neale. A glance had shown her that Agnes was lying in a state of unconsciousness; and she lost no time in profiting thereby. Noiselessly closing the door, she made an imperious gesture for Luke Corbet to pass farther into the room, so as not to be betwixt herself and that door; and he at once obeyed her—for the man seemed utterly overwhelmed with terror at the appearance of Miss Neale.

"Now, Mr. Hardress," she said, in a voice which although subdued, was most firm and decisive in its accents, "sit down at that table—commit to paper a solemn declaration that within ten days from the present time you will make me your wife—or mercilessly will I shoot you through the head!"

As she thus spoke, Cicely held one weapon levelled point-blank towards Hector's countenance, and the other towards Luke Corbet. The expression of her features was that of the strongest resolve; and Hector Hardress, who knew her character and disposition well, trembled with an almost mortal terror as he felt that his life hung upon a thread.

"Hasten, sir," she said: "there is not a minute to lose! Decide!—you know that you are in my power!"

And Hector saw that such was the case. All the circumstances of his predicament swept through his mind in a moment. The forcible yet stealthy nature of the entry which had been effected into the house—the black masks which he and his companion wore, and which would be recollected by Agnes when she returned to consciousness—all bespoke a case of burglary in which any individual would be justified in shooting the offenders on the spot.

For a single instant he thought of rushing at Cicely and endeavouring to overpower her; but the pistols were most menacingly levelled at himself and his follower; and there was in the expression of Miss Neale's countenance so much stern decision that Hector dared not attempt violence nor hesitate another instant what course to pursue.

He accordingly sat down at a table on which there were writing-materials; and as Cicely bent over him to dictate, he shuddered with a cold horror on feeling that the muzzle of one of the pistols was touching the back of his head. He was completely in the power of that strange, courageous, desperate young woman; and he was compelled to yield to her imperious will.

"Seek not," she said, in a firm though whispering voice, "to disguise or alter your signature with the hope hereafter raising a doubt in respect to its genuineness; for I am not to be trifled with! To me it is now the same whether this night I wreak a deadly but safe revenge for all my wrongs—or whether I coerce you into such a pledge of atonement which you will not dare violate."

The signature of Hector Hardress was affixed to the document, the contents of which he had written to Cicely's dictation; and as he rose from the chair, she imperiously signalled the valet to approach and affix his own signature as that of a witness to the deed. But all this while she so levelled the weapons that they held the lives of master and man hanging as it were to threads; and Luke Corbet crept like a grovelling coward towards the chair which she so peremptorily indicated. He nevertheless wrote his name plainly and boldly enough; and then Cicely, motioning towards the door, gave utterance to the single imperious word—"Begone!"

Utterly crest-fallen, discomfited, yet full of an impotent rage to which he dared not give vent, Hardress stole forth from the chamber, followed by his valet. But ere Luke Corbet passed the threshold, he turned his head for a moment; and through the holes of his mask he flung upon Cicely a rapid look. She answered it with a glance of triumphant intelligence; and then the men disappeared from her view.

Miss Neale now advanced towards the couch; and finding that Agnes was still wrapped in the profoundest unconsciousness, she took up the document from the table—and stealing back to her own chamber, secured it, together with the pistols, in her box.

"Had he refused—or had he attempted the least violence," she murmured to herself, "I would have consummated my vengeance ruthlessly and remorselessly! But it is far better so!"—and she glanced triumphantly towards the box in which the deed was secured.

She then returned into Miss Evelyn's chamber; but she did not immediately adopt any measures for the restoration of the young lady. It did not suit her purpose that an alarm should be raised until Hector and his valet were safe out of the premises, and consequently out of pursuit.

The house was all quiet: the entire scene had passed unheard and unsuspected by the domestics; and thus Agnes could never know that Cicely had suffered some little while to elapse ere she adopted the requisite means to bring her back to consciousness.

When Miss Neale fancied that a sufficient interval had gone by to place Hector and Luke Corbet beyond the reach of any danger, she began to bestow her attentions on Agnes.

Our young heroine slowly opened her eyes—for the stupefying effects of the chloroform did not pass immediately away; and now Miss Neale thought it prudent to summon the domestics and to assume an excited and terrified expression of countenance.

The villa was therefore speedily a scene of consternation and dismay: but Cicely soon began to perform a part of heroic boldness, by descending to ascertain (as she said) whether the burglars were still upon the premises. Rachel would not suffer her to proceed alone; and the means by which the entry had been effected was very quickly ascertained. We need hardly observe that Agnes was powerfully excited when, being brought back to complete consciousness, she remembered how she had seen two individuals with black masks in her chamber. But nothing had been carried off; and thus Miss Evelyn and the domestics fancied they had every reason to congratulate themselves that they had



escaped with nothing more serious than the alarm and consternation which the incident had left behind it.

Cicely's explanations were soon given, and were as a matter of course fully believed by those who listened to them. She said that on retiring to her chamber she felt no inclination to sleep, and that she had therefore sat down over one of the books which she found there. She read for some time—until becoming sleepy, she was about to commence the process of disapparelling herself, when she thought she heard a door open upon the landing. Fearing that Miss Evelyn might be ill—or at all events convinced that something unusual was taking place—Cicely went on to say that she issued forth from her own room; and perceiving that the door of Miss Evelyn's chamber was half open, she at once hastened thither.

"Then, to my consternation," proceeded Cicely, "I beheld the two men; and a cry escaped my

lips. I wonder that you"—now addressing herself to the servants—"heard it not. The burglars were instantaneously seized with a panic—and they fled. I do not hesitate to confess that for some few moments I was so overwhelmed with terror as to be almost in a fainting condition: I had no power to give vent to another cry, nor even to move from the chair on which I had sunk down. If the wretches had only known what the state of my feeling was, they would not have hurried off so precipitately:—but crime often makes cowards of those who are seeking to perpetrate it."

The matter continued to be discussed for some while longer: but it was evident to Cicely that Agnes did not for an instant suspect that one of the masked individuals was Hector Hardress; and it did not suit Miss Neale's purpose to afford any enlightening information upon the point. No apprehension was entertained that the supposed burglars would take it into their heads to return; and

thus it was not deemed requisite to communicate with the police-authorities until the morning. Cicely passed the remainder of the night in the chamber of Agnes, towards whom she displayed attentions that enlisted the most friendly and grateful feelings on the part of our heroine.

At an early hour in the morning Rachel proceeded to the police-station; and an Inspector, with a couple of constables, at once accompanied her to Sidney Villa. Having carefully examined the premises, the officers expressed their opinion that the burglary had been clumsily executed and was evidently the work of novices in the art. They inquired whether Miss Evelyn purposed to offer any reward for their apprehension?—but Agnes did not wish to take a step which would attract public attention to the villa and make it the subject of newspaper-paragraphs. She accordingly declined to adopt the suggestion that had been thrown out. The officers nevertheless assured her that every endeavour should be made to get upon the track of the burglars; and they recommended various precautions which might be adopted for rendering the premises thenceforth more secure. These hints were adopted by Agnes; and for the remainder of the day carpenters and smiths were employed at Sidney Villa in establishing better defences than those which had previously existed against burglarious attempts.

The officers could not help thinking there was some strange mystery in the occurrence: but still they did not disbelieve Cicely Neale's explanations—nor did their suspicions in any way settle upon the domestics. They instituted all possible inquiries in the neighbourhood, but could learn nothing to afford them the slightest clue to the authors of the outrage; and Miss Neale inwardly rejoiced that everything should thus have passed off in a manner so well suited to the furtherance of those views which she had founded upon the previous knowledge that Hector Hardress contemplated the proceeding in respect to Agnes. The source whence Cicely had obtained the information on which she had so resolutely acted, is no doubt already suspected by the reader; for the adventurous and persevering young lady had succeeded in bribing Luke Corbet to her interests.

CHAPTER XX.

THE "CATHARINE MILLARD."

THE scene of our story now shifts to a far-distant quarter of the world; and the reader is about to be introduced to scenes of an interest widely different from those on which his attention has hitherto been riveted. Yet it must not be imagined at the outset that the episode on which we are about to enter, is utterly disconnected from the thread of our story: on the contrary, it will be presently found that they are all links of the same chain—and if for the time severed and scattered, yet destined sooner or later to resume their appropriate junctions and fittings.

A large merchant-ship was ploughing the waves of the Caribbean Sea, and making for the island of Jamaica, from which it was still however at a

considerable distance. It was an English vessel, and had originally been fitted out in that spirit of enterprise which was excited in England at the time thereof we are writing, by the first reports of the discovery of gold in California. The "Catharine Millard," named after one of the daughters of its owner, had thus been freighted from the port of London with that species of merchandise which it was presumed would obtain a ready sale in the Californian gold-regions; and the Captain—an intelligent and enterprising man—had received discretionary powers in respect to his future proceedings after his arrival in California. The venture had proved most successful: and the Captain, judging by all the information he received at the nascent town of San Francisco, determined to undertake a trading expedition to the West Indies, whence with the produce of those islands it was his resolve to return to California ere he bent his course back again to England. In the execution of these plans it is evident that a long period of time must necessarily be involved, and the crew had to calculate upon a protracted absence from their native country. But the officers and men all shared in the enterprising spirit of their Captain: the Catharine Millard was a fine vessel—there was the novelty of visiting countries previously unknown, except by name, to most of the crew—and there were likewise opportunities of a little private traffic for their own individual advantages. Moreover, the voyages had hitherto been prosperous enough: twice had Cape Horn been doubled—and with the exception of those ordinary dangers which invariably attend upon ships visiting that quarter of the world, there had been nothing to constitute any very startling features in the expedition. Thus at length, after a lapse of about twenty months since the Catharine Millard first cleared out of the Thames, it was now ploughing the sea which washes the shores of the West India Islands.

It was evening: the sun had set—the breeze was blowing strongly—and the Catharine Millard was pursuing its way under as much canvass as it was thought prudent to carry, considering that the aspect of the heavens was of a somewhat menacing character. Leaning over the bulwarks, and watching the waves as they rolled past—sometimes in dark undulating volumes, at others gleaming with their white foam through the increasing obscurity of the hour—was a youth who held the position of a junior officer. He was a fine, tall, handsome-looking young man, with an expression of countenance in which a noble frankness blended with the calm hardihood and serene fortitude of the sailor. The thick clustering curls of his dark brown hair, which he wore somewhat long, were waving beneath the gold-laced edge of his blue cap; and his large blue eyes were, as we have already said, fixed upon the waves as they rolled past. He was now more thoughtful than usual; for habitually he was gay and cheerful—he was fond of the profession in which he had embarked—the excitement of a sailor's life suited his bold, enterprising, and somewhat reckless disposition—and he had moreover from the outset resolved upon forming a fine career for himself. Why, then, was he thoughtful now? Was it that he entertained any dread lest his sanguine hopes should be disappointed?—was it that through the

tyranny of superiors any damp had been thrown upon his mind or any unjust curb put upon his naturally fine spirits?—or was it that his heart began to fail him as he beheld the indications of an approaching tempest? No—it was nothing of all this. Being a general favourite on board the Catharine Millard, he had every reason to be gratified with the kind treatment he experienced from the Captain and at the hands of his brother-officers, as well as with the respectful attachment which all the sailors displayed towards him. His confidence in his own power of pushing his way in the world had received no shock; and as for alarm at the prospect of an approaching storm, this gallant midshipman knew not what fear was. But a melancholy for which he himself could not possibly account, had gradually stolen over him—a creeping sense of gloom that not even the natural buoyancy of his spirit could dispel;—and thus, though he did not actually abandon himself to it, yet he was drawn as it were involuntarily beneath its influence until at last it appeared to gain the strength of a presentiment of some evil.

With an effort to shake it off, our young midshipman suddenly quitted his motionless position at the bulwark; and he was about to join another officer who was standing near the man at the wheel, when a hand was laid upon his arm—and a trembling, quivering voice asked, “Do you—do you think, Mr. Barrington, that—that—there is any danger?”

The question was put by an old man, whose age could not have been a day less than sixty, and might have been two or three years more advanced—but whose shrivelled, attenuated form had become wiry, hardened, and tanned as it were, into a condition of self-preserving vigour. He was short of stature—stooped very slightly—and habitually walked with a firm step, though at the present moment he was trembling in every limb: for weatherbeaten with voyage and travel though he were, inured to hardship, and experienced in perils both by land by sea, he had nevertheless failed to acquire the grand quality which if not inborn, is at least usually gained from the circumstances of such a life—namely, that of *courage*. But then this old man was one of that class whose minds are ever haunted by countless apprehensions. The sharpness of his thin features—the keen gaze of those eyes wherein suspicion ever seemed to lurk—the strong compression of the thin lips—the deep lines which, different from the wrinkles of old age, marked his countenance—and the general manner of mistrust, reserve, and timidity which characterised him,—all denoted the miser. Such was the individual who, creeping towards the young midshipman, put that tremulous question whether any danger were to be apprehended?

“Why, Mr. Elverstone,” answered the youth, “there is always more or less danger, you know, to those who have but some pieces of timber as a barrier betwixt them and eternity. But if ever timbers were well joined together—and if ever a vessel showed a handiness in doing her work—it is assuredly in respect to the good ship Catharine Millard.”

“You sailors always give me some such reply as this—always!” said the old man, petulantly and querulously. “I never in my life knew a seaman, old or young, who did not swear that his ship was

the best that ever swam—though perhaps all the while it was the veriest leaky old tub——”

“You had better go down below, Mr. Elverstone,” interrupted young Barrington: “for I don’t hesitate to tell you that it is likely to prove a rough night. Though with a good ship and plenty of sea-room——”

“Always these same phrases!” ejaculated the miser, still more petulantly and querulously than before. “I—I don’t know how it is—but you sailors are the most reckless dare-devils——”

“Surely your experiences of the sea,” rejoined Barrington, “ought to inspire you with more fortitude.”

“It is just on account of those very experiences,” said the old man, “that—that I feel—you understand me—a little nervous. But do tell me—for you have always spoke kinder to me than any one else from the very first day that I embarked at San Francisco——”

Here the miser’s speech was interrupted by a sudden command on the part of the Captain to take in more sail; for the power of the wind was increasing. Elverstone’s alarm likewise increased: but the young midshipman had sped away from him to attend to his own duties; and as the spray was now beating in sharp showers over the deck, the trembling old man descended to his berth.

Again, in about ten minutes, Gustavus Barrington was leaning against the bulwark, contemplating the rolling waves which were now successively crested with foam; and again did an unknown saddening influence steal more and more heavily upon his mind. Again too did it assume the sensation of a presentiment: but the natural fearlessness of the youth’s disposition would not permit him to anticipate any serious danger from the tempest that might probably arise. His thoughts travelled far, far across the ocean—until he at length found himself saying silently in the depths of his soul, “God grant that nothing has happened to my dear cousin Winnie or to my poor old grandfather!”

Nearly all sailors are superstitious; and though the natural intelligence of Gustavus Barrington preserved him from a gross infection of that superstition with which he was placed in contact, yet he had been brought within its influence at too tender an age to be enabled to escape it entirely. His present mood was full well calculated to encourage the feeling, until at length he resolved to bear in mind the particular date on which he was thus affected.

“The fifth of October,” he said to himself: “I shall not forget it. After all, it will most likely prove to be nothing more than one of those strange desponding feelings for which one cannot account at the time?—and perhaps, when I return to England, I shall find by a comparison of notes that those whom I hold dear were as happy at this hour as under their unfortunate circumstances they possibly could be? Oh, Winnie! to embrace you once again—and you too, my poor persecuted grandfather—how rejoiced shall I be!”

Gustavus Barrington turned away from the bulwark and joined his brother-officers, with whom he conversed for some little while. The weather grew more and more threatening; the strength of the wind was increasing into the violence of a gale: the waves ran higher and higher; and their sum-

mits, breaking into foam, gleamed ghastly through the increasing darkness of the night. All the usual bustle and activity belonging to such circumstances on board a ship, were now displayed. The mandates of the Captain were sent forth firmly and steadily, but with somewhat more peremptoriness than usual, as if to convey the impression that they must be instantaneously obeyed. And it was likewise with steadiness, though with an alacrity which appeared to take every passing moment into account, that the various orders were executed by the seamen under the guidance of their officers. Thus, for the next hour the time of Gustavus Barrington was fully employed, as well as that of the rest of the crew.

But now came an interval of a few minutes during which he was again standing by himself on the deck; and then towards him again crept the trembling old miser.

"Tell me, Mr. Barrington," he said,—"pray, for God's sake tell me! do you think—do you, I mean, entertain the slightest apprehension—I don't mean fear you know—because to imply that, would be insulting a brave young gentleman like you; but—"

"Really, Mr. Elverstone, you had better keep below," answered the youth, speaking kindly however, for he could not help pitying the wretched old man, although he full well knew his hard, griping, avaricious disposition.

"Well, well, I will," said the miser: "but pray, pray promise me one thing? Look you, my dear Mr. Barrington—my dear Gustavus—for you are a good youth—if there should be any danger you will let me know first of all—before the other passengers—you will not leave it till the last—you will come and whisper in my ears—you will give me a kind hint—"

"Rest assured, sir," interrupted Gustavus, with a slight display of indignation at the manifest selfishness contained in this appeal,—"rest assured, sir, that if there be any danger, and if an extreme case should arise—which I really do not expect—the Captain will adopt all requisite precautions for the safety of his passengers and crew."

"Yes, yee—I know it," interjected the old man, in a strange nervous state of querulous petulance and abject helplessness. "But then, in those cases, there is no respect for persons or property—and you, my dear Gustavus—Heavens, how the ship pitches!—you, I say, must take care of me, for I am an old man—The timbers creak frightfully!—and if it should come to anything very, very perilous—The spray is blinding!—you must get me first into a boat—or on a raft—anything, my dear young man!—but for God's sake do not desert me!"

"I shall desert no one to whom I can render the slightest assistance," responded Gustavus. "But I repeat, your apprehensions may be altogether unfounded—you are meeting danger half-way—"

At this moment the ship experienced a violent shock, as if it struck against some object which standing up from the depth of the ocean, checked its progress: but it was an immense wave that broke over it. Quick as lightning did Gustavus Barrington throw his left arm round the old man, while with his right hand he firmly grasped a rope. For an instant it seemed as if the vessel were submerged and engulfed in the roaring

waters. But buoyant she rose—the raging billows swept off the deck—and the miser was clinging, half dead with affright, to the youth who by his sudden presence of mind had saved him from being borne away by that terrifically sweeping gush of waters.

"Oh, my God!" faltered forth the miserable wretch, gasping for breath like one that was half-drowned; "I know we shall be overwhelmed presently! Fool—idiot that I was to leave a place—"

"Where you would have been murdered for your gold," responded Gustavus, "if you had remained. But pray go below, Mr. Elverstone—I conjure—I command you!"

"Yes, yee—in a minute," he tremulously replied: "but—but—when I am below, it seems to me as if the danger was a thousand times greater. And yet here it is awful! My God, those dreadful waves!—this fearful hurricane!—the creaking and groaning of the timbers, as if the ship itself was a living thing! Oh, my dear Gustavus—good young man—excellent youth—you will have pity on me—and if the worst should happen—"

"Yes, yee, Mr. Elverstone," ejaculated Gustavus. "But you must go below."

"One word more!—only one word!"—and the old man now spoke rapidly, while both his hands clutched the youth's arms with their bony, wiry fingers—and his eyes were fixed keenly through the darkness upon Barrington's handsome countenance. "I have got a little gold—not much, you know—very, very little—but still it is *some*—and if you save me—"

"No inducement of this kind," interrupted Gustavus, "is necessary to—"

"Stop! stop!—do not be so hasty! I don't mean to insult you—but do for heaven's sake think of me! Think of me first of all—if the worst should arrive—as I am sure it will! And you know that chest of mine—you have seen it in my berth—Well, my dear Gustavus—"

Here again the usual warning was given by those who were on the look-out: again did a mighty sea sweep over the ship, making it reel and quiver and tremble as if its huge bulk were but a mere elastic reed in the midst of the troubled waters; and again was the old man saved by the timely interposition of the generous Gustavus. Once more the Catharine Millard rose buoyant on the agitated sea; and then Gustavus bore the old miser, more dead than alive, down to his berth. The instant he was there, Elverstone threw himself upon the chest which contained his treasures; and recovering all the keenness of his vitality, he renewed his half-tremulous, half-passionate entreaties to the young midshipman in the same strain as before. But Gustavus tarried not to hear him; and closing the door of the cabin, he rushed upon deck.

The tempest was now rapidly rising to its full height,—presenting all its features of awful sublimity and of terror to those minds that were susceptible of these influences. But there was no fear on the part of the officers or men of the Catharine Millard. A sense of danger there was—and a serious sense too; but there was no craven alarm. Every one continued in the performance of his duty with a calm steadiness of purpose, and yet with all the alacrity which skilful experience

taught and which every successive exigency demanded. And the waves were now rolling, in landman's terms, "mountains high"—the wind had acquired the violence of a hurricane—the vessel pitched, and in all its timbers it creaked and groaned like a living thing; while the rattling of the cordage mingled with the other voices which were inseparable from the tempest. His garments saturated with water—his brown locks fluttering in their heavy dampness beneath the cap which the leathern strap had retained upon his head—Gustavus Barrington was second to none in the activity with which he performed his duties. All gloomy presentiment was forgotten now: the sense of danger, rising superior to every mental element of weakness, had inspired him with a thrilling courage—the excitement of the strongest fortitude. He thought of his cousin and of his grand-aire—but not in a way to render those images a source of weakness: on the contrary, they seemed as incentives to the performance of his duty in a manner which might make them proud of him, if he should survive this awful night and return in due time to England to tell the tale.

And as that night advanced, so did the tempest seem to gather fresh power and to acquire from the Demon of the Storm fresh elements of fury. Yet bravely did the good ship roll on under the small amount of canvass that it now carried; and in its buoyancy it seemed to defy the power of the billows to engulf it, or that of the winds to scatter it as a wreck upon the ocean.

It is not our purpose to enter into unnecessary details relative to this scene of storm, which every instant grew more awful amidst the stupendous darkness of the night. The sea continued to break over the ship—at one time carrying away a portion of its bulwarks, and at another staving in the principal boat. After a while it became evident that danger was indeed most imminent; and the Captain now made all requisite preparations for the worst. The rudder was gone—the ship was leaking—and she was drifting likewise at the mercy of the hurricane, which might at any moment carry her upon a rock or sand-bank. The passengers—who had hitherto for the most part remained below in compliance with the earnest injunctions of the Captain—rushed upon the deck; and a wild scene of horror ensued. Mothers were pressing their children to their bosoms: females who had no children—and were in this sense happier than the others—were flying about in every direction: frenzy was displayed by husbands and fathers on one side—while on the other they sank down in blank helpless despair. But where was the old miser? Amidst the bustle and activity occasioned by the preparations which had been made in case the worst should ensue, Gustavus Barrington had forgotten the wretched being who had so earnestly and piteously entreated to be remembered by him. All of a sudden the youth recollected him; and convinced that the crisis was now approaching—feeling likewise that he was an object of reliance on the part of the helpless old man—and generously anxious to do his best to serve a fellow-creature in that awful hour of peril, the youth resolved to seek him. Making his hasty way amidst the empty casks, the hencoops, the planks, and the spars, which had been crowded confusedly on the deck in order to serve the last

moments of the expected emergency, Gustavus sought everywhere for the object of his interest. The dread spectacle of lamenting women and children crying in their agonizing terror made his heart bleed: and, oh! he felt as if he could at the instant offer up his own life as a propitiation to the fury of the Demon of the Storm if by that sacrifice he could purchase the safety of all the rest!

Vain was the rapid search of Gustavus upon the deck for the old miser; and he rushed down below. He tore open the door of Elverstone's berth; and there a strange spectacle met his eyes. A lantern, swinging to the ceiling formed by the deck above, showed Gustavus the old miser kneeling by the side of his chest, and thence from smaller boxes taking quantities of gold, alike in nuggets and in dust, and with the precious metal filling two or three leathern bags which had previously contained other articles. There was something but too well calculated to shock the mind of Gustavus Barrington in the spectacle which he thus beheld,—that wretched old man's last care being devoted to his gold at an instant when death was hovering around, bat-like, upon the huge sable pinions of the storm!

"For heaven's sake come!—come quick, I say!" exclaimed Gustavus: and his hand clutched Elverstone's shoulder.

"One minute! only one minute!" shrieked forth the miser, lifting his countenance, on the haggardness of which the sickly light of the lantern fell with the ghastliest effect.

"Not a minute, madman that you are!" cried Gustavus; and he made a movement as if to wind his arms about Elverstone's form and carry him thence by force.

"No, no! Keep off!" literally shrieked forth the miser. "I go only with what I possess about me! Good heavens! to be thrown as a beggar upon the world! No! no!"

Half wild with agony of terror on account of the storm, and with the dread of being torn away from the treasures that were dearer to him than even life itself, Elverstone completed his preparations with a remarkable celerity. His leathern bags were filled—in another moment they were slung upon a belt which he had got ready for the purpose—and this belt he fastened round his waist. Although but a few instants were wasted in these additional proceedings, yet Gustavus could scarcely restrain his impatience so far as to allow the old man to complete them; and he even threatened to abandon him to his fate if he did not at once follow him to the deck. But still there was something more to do. The miser had taken off his coat in order to secure his treasure the more effectually about his person; and he now proceeded to resume that garment.

"Come quick, I say!" cried Gustavus: "or by heaven I will leave you, insensate that you are!"

"What! and allow every one to see these bags and suspect what they contain?" querulously cried the old man. "No, no!—by heaven I will not do it! See! the coat is half on. There now the other sleeve! And now—"

But here he was stopped short by a tremendous shock which the ship sustained,—a shock more powerful than any that it had yet experienced during the three or four hours that the fearful

tempest had lasted. The miser was thrown violently over the open chest from which he had been taking forth his gold; while Gustavus was so powerfully hurled against the door-post of the cabin, and thence on the floor itself, that he was stunned.

For a few minutes did he thus remain in a state of unconsciousness—from which on slowly awakening, he fancied that he was under the influence of a dream. But a crowd of fearful recollections soon trooped in unto his brain, rapid as the tempest that was sweeping over the devoted ship—rapid too as the gush of waters into her battered hull! The lantern was extinguished: Gustavus was enveloped in total darkness; and springing to his feet, he was about to rush towards the stairs, when he bethought himself of the miser. He groped about for the old man, and quickly found him lying across the open chest. He was motionless; and Gustavus muttered to himself, "He is dead!"

But Elverstone groaned: the young midshipman spoke to him hurriedly and excitedly; and the miser returned some answer, though feebly and indistinctly: yet as he lived, the generous Barrington seized him in his arms. He bore him up the stairs; and scarcely had he reached the deck with his burden, when the wild cries of human voices mingled their last notes of agony with the terrific chorus of the raging wind and the roaring billows.

Some minutes elapsed before Gustavus Barrington succeeded in completely comprehending his present position: but after a hurried search all over the deck—after calling forth many familiar names and receiving no response—he found that himself and the old miser were alone left in the vessel. The boats were gone, except the one which had been rendered useless by the violence of the billow that stove it in; and more than half the hencecoops, spars, and casks which but a short time past encumbered the deck, were likewise gone. The ship was lying motionless, with the sea beating terrifically over its bows; so that Gustavus knew that it must have got upon a rock or a sank-bank—but he conjectured that it was the latter. The departure from the devoted Catharine Millard must have been effected with all possible despatch—indeed with the wildest of haste on the part of crew and passengers; and it was no wonder if in the confusion attending that awful moment, the absence of himself and the old miser should not have been noticed. But as for the fate of at least some portion of those who had abandoned the ship, it was but too plainly and awfully told by the agonizing cries that had mingled their shrill piercing accents with the deep bass of the ocean and the thundering diapason of the storm.

But what was now to be done? There was for an instant a feeling as if of thankfulness in the heart of Gustavus that he should have been delayed by the old miser in the cabin; for life still remained to him, while he had only too much reason to believe that all who had left the ship had found a sepulchre in the deep waters. Yes—life remained unto himself; and where there was life there was hope! Gustavus resolved to do nothing rashly, and yet to avoid if possible falling into the other extreme by suffering through

delay. The ship, as we have said, was motionless as a bulk, though it quivered and vibrated throughout its entire length as each rapidly succeeding billow dashed with appalling din and fury over its bows. Its forepart was lifted up somewhat; and it heeled over a little on one side; but the point which Gustavus had to judge of and to speculate upon, was whether it were likely to hold together until daylight. He knew the dawn was not far distant; and if it were possible for himself and his aged companion to remain on board the wreck until light succeeded to the awful darkness of this night, they might be rescued by some passing ship.

Bidding Elverstone remain where he was and cling fast to a rope so as to avoid being washed away by the sweeping billows, Gustavus descended into the cabins to ascertain to what extent the water had risen within them. He procured a lantern, which he lighted; and he continued his investigations with mingled despatch and caution. From all appearances by which he could judge, he came to the conclusion that of the two desperate alternatives it would be better to remain upon the wreck than for himself and his aged companion to trust themselves to a raft upon the seething, roaring cauldron of the ocean. This decision he communicated to Elverstone: but the old man appeared not to comprehend the words which the youth uttered; for, lying upon the deck and mechanically clutching fast to the rope which Gustavus had so fixed as to protect him, he murmured vaguely and in a semi-idiotic manner, "Yes—the gold! 'tis all safe!"

For a moment the high-minded Barrington was seized with a feeling of ineffable disgust for the wretch who thus clung to his treasure where it would have been sufficient to cling only to his life: but the youth had far more important subjects for his thoughts than to abandon his mind to any particular reflections relative to so piteous a wretch. He began to busy himself in preparations for the emergency which might arise at any moment. With his own arms and his own unaided strength, he performed a task which in other circumstances would have required several men to accomplish. Flinging off his jacket that he might work all the more freely, he got together spars and planks—he attached them one to another with strong cordage—and he lashed them to empty casks. He was careful in the first instance to commence his labours on a part of the deck where the bulwarks had been carried away, so that his raft might be with the least degree of trouble committed to the raging element at the first indication of an awful crisis being at hand in respect to the ship.

By the time the raft was finished, Gustavus was so exhausted that he sank down upon the deck, where he lay for some minutes with energies completely prostrate. The spray kept beating over him—until at length he aroused himself once more; and again he descended to the cabins. There he procured a bottle of spirits; he inhibited a larger dram than ever in his life had hitherto passed his lips; and he proceeded to pour some of the exhilarating fluid down the throat of the old miser, who appeared to have sunk into a listless apathy of mind and a complete physical numbness. The potent cordial infused life, and

heat, and strength into Elverstone's frame; and becoming completely conscious of his position once more, he murmured, "Good youth! excellent Gustavus! I knew you would not abandon me!"

Young Berrington proceeded to inform the old man of the preparations he had made for their escape, if the moment of need should come and compel them to leave the wreck; and Elverstone kept exclaiming, "Good youth! excellent Gustavus! you shall have a portion of my gold. I do not possess much—but you shall have the full half—I mean the quarter of one of these bags——"

"Talk not of your gold!" ejaculated Gustavus. "If you had to swim for your life, it would help to sink you; and the god of your existence would thus become the demon to plunge you down into the abyss! Haste—rise—get upon the raft—and let me fasten you to it: for at the first cracking of the timbers—at the first warning sound—we must in the twinkling of an eye commit ourselves to the ocean!"

The wretched helpless old man suffered himself to be guided by the youth who had already saved his life more than once during this fearful night, and who seemed to have his energies so completely about him. Elverstone accordingly arose from the spot where he had been crouching down upon the deck in the safest place that Gustavus could have deposited him in; and clinging to his young companion, he advanced to the raft. On this he seated himself; and Gustavus prepared to attach a cord round the old man's waist and then fasten it to the ropes which held the spars and planks together.

"For God's sake don't touch my gold! don't take it!" earnestly whispered the avaricious wretch, while through the obscurity his eyes were penetratingly fixed on the youth's countenance as if in an agony of suspense to ascertain what his real purpose might be.

But Gustavus was too indignant to make any response: and yet instead of abandoning the old wretch to his fate, as he might have been well excused for doing, he prosecuted his generous task. The cords were fixed; and the young man now felt that he had done as much as mortal man could do on behalf of a fellow-creature.

"You are a good youth," said Elverstone; "and—and—I will treat you well. Only save me—for God's sake save me," he continued, with drivelling childishness: "and you shall have your fair share——"

"Instead of appealing thus to me," answered Gustavus solemnly, "you should lift up your prayers to Him whose name you have just mentioned!"

"Yes, yes—I will pray," responded Elverstone; "but—but—I know not how. Teach me."

Gustavus was infinitely shocked at this evidence of the deplorable religious ignorance of that old man,—a man who in the worship which he had given undividedly unto the golden idol, had lost sight of that infinitely sublimer worship which was due unto the Eternal. But quickly conquering his feeling of repugnance towards his aged companion, the youth prayed aloud; and Elverstone followed him—but with a nervous tremulousness of accents, as if he were a wretch proceeding to

the place of execution and in the almost desperate condition of his guilty soul repeating the words that flowed from the mouth of the chaplain.

At length daybreak began to appear in the eastern horizon—at first slowly and fitfully; for the sombre storm-clouds hung heavily with their dark gloomy curtains upon the canopy of heaven. Gustavus kept his eyes riveted upon that point where the sun was struggling to pierce with its rays the obscurity that remained from night; and gradually the gleam advanced—gradually it grew stronger and stronger, until the entire prospect of the surrounding ocean was revealed to the view of the youth and his aged companion. Not a sail was to be seen, save the canvases which hung to the yards of the wreck; and though Gustavus swept the ocean with a glass, and carried his regards scrutinizingly all round the horizon, no hopeful sign could he discern. Nor was there so much as a speck upon the sea to permit the belief that any of the ill-fated crew of the *Catherine Millard* still held existence in this world; and the generous-hearted youth shed tears as he sadly murmured to himself, "Alas, they have doubtless all perished!"

He again descended to the cabins, to procure some refreshment: but he now found that the water was much higher in the ship than he could have anticipated; and moreover that there were certain ominous sounds which made him fear that she must soon go to pieces. In short, at about an hour after daybreak Gustavus came to the conclusion that it would be an act of madness to delay any longer the departure from the wreck; for if the ship should suddenly heel over or break in the midst, himself and his aged companion would inevitably be sucked down into the vortex, and perhaps crushed amongst the parting planks and beams. He therefore communicated his intention to Elverstone; and having supplied himself with as much biscuit as he could find in the cabins, as well as with a small cask of fresh water, Gustavus prepared to commit the raft to the ocean. This was easily accomplished, inasmuch as it had been fashioned at a part of the deck where the bulwarks had been torn away; and as the ship itself heeled somewhat over on one side, the slope gave an impetus to the raft the moment Gustavus cut the cords which had hitherto retained it in a fixed position. The proceeding was accomplished with perfect safety; and the raft, launched upon the troubled waters, with those two human beings upon it, was borne away by the force of the tide from the neighbourhood of the wreck.

CHAPTER XXI.

KINGSTON.

GUSTAVUS had not been long seated on the raft with his aged companion before the apprehension began to seize upon him that its construction was not sufficiently solid to enable it to resist the violence of the waves. It was tossed up and down, hither and thither—now being elevated high upon the summit of a mighty wave—then being plunged deep down into a yawning abyss. The cords were so strained at one moment that they became per-

ceptibly loose at another; and if the raft went to pieces there was the danger of those who were upon it being crushed by the subsequent collision of the planks. Besides, Gustavus knew that Elverstone had not the power or energy to cling long with his arms to a single plank, if by the rupture of the raft the cordage which retained him should be broken also.

Every time the youth was borne by the raft to the top of a billow, he swept his straining eyes around; but naught could he see except the wreck so lately quitted, the wide expanse of the swelling ocean, and the sombre clouds above. Yes—there were birds now and then winging their flight through the air, dipping their wide-spread wings in the foaming crests of the waves, and ever and anon circling above the raft as if almost prepared to swoop upon those while living, whom they doubtless expected presently to have as their prey when dead. The youth's heart sank within him: he dared not now think of the cousin whom he loved so tenderly, and of his venerable grandsire, from whom nearly two years back he had parted in England: but still their images kept presenting themselves to his view—and he recollected how earnestly they had reasoned against his resolve of going to sea when first in the glow of youthful confidence he had vowed that he would eat the bread of his own industry and carve out a career for himself.

Presently the catastrophe which young Barrington had for some time dreaded, took place, by the sudden snapping of the cords at one extremity of the raft; and a shriek of agony peeled forth from the lips of the old miser: for two of the planks, when parting and then quickly and violently coming together again, had crushed one of his legs between them. At the imminent peril of being swept altogether off the raft, or of experiencing a similar injury, the generous-hearted Gustavus lost no time in assisting his aged companion: and matters were now every instant getting worse and worse. The tossing of the planks which were disunited at one end, speedily produced a similar severance at the other; and then a wild shriek rang over the ocean—for Elverstone, being hurled from the plank to which he vainly strove to cling, fell back into the boiling billows. No possible assistance could Gustavus render him: he had disappeared from the view; and the youth, clinging to the remnant of the raft, was being borne rapidly away by some current from the scene of the catastrophe. Again a cry rang in his ears: he looked back—and there for an instant he caught a glimpse of the miser rising above the water as far as his waist, just as if he had been propelled straight upward by some power from below. And Oh! what a hideous ghastly countenance it was of which the youth caught that one last transient glimpse: for the form of the drowning man sank straight down again; and though Gustavus continued to look for some time with an agony of suspense in the same direction, he beheld not the miser again rise from the turbulent waters that were engulfing him.

The incident completed the causes for deep dependency on the part of Gustavus Barrington. Little as he would have valued the companionship of such a man as Elverstone in the great world

where there were other associates to select,—yet there, on the bosom of that wide sea, the companionship of any human creature was to be desired in preference to the awful and stupendous solitude in which the youth now found himself. Hope was utterly abandoning him. His energies had been so overtaxed during so many hours in the past night, that a reaction was now rapidly setting in—a prostration alike of mind and body; so that he began to feel as if it were useless to cling any longer to that plank, and as if he might as well glide off it, and put a speedy end to his anguish and his despair. But no!—to do this were suicidal; and he said within himself, "It is my duty to cling as long as possible to that life which God has given me!"

The pious reflection cheered him; and in a few moments this cheerfulness was changed into a sudden joy as he caught a glimpse of something which he fancied was a sail in the distance. It was from the summit of a billow that he thus beheld it: then down into the trough of the sea went the remnant of the raft to which he was clinging;—up the ascent it laboured: the eminence of a wave again tossed it amidst its foam and dashing spray; but, O joy! there was indeed a sail in the horizon!

The experienced eye of Gustavus Barrington soon convinced him that the vessel to which the sail belonged was proceeding in a direction calculated to afford him every chance of being perceived and saved, although he knew that some considerable time must yet elapse before that hope could be realized. Nevertheless, all his energies, mental and physical, were again reanimated: he clung with tenacity to those planks which floated between himself and utter destruction; and from the depths of his soul the sincerest prayers went up to heaven, beseeching that he might not be disappointed. In due time he was enabled to discern that it was a square-rigged ship of large size; and a little while afterwards he came to the conviction that it was a man-of-war—for his eye could trace two dotted rows of port-holes. And now, when nearer still, he began waving his kerchief: every time the remnant of the raft bore him to the summit of the billows, he raised his signal as high as his arm could stretch out above his head; and hope grew stronger and stronger in his breast.

Once, when floating on the top of one of those mighty rolling waves, the planks turned in such a way that the wreck, which was at a considerable distance, met his view: but while his eyes were still fixed upon it, it suddenly heeled over and sank in deep water. It seemed as if it were destined that the adventurous youth should behold the very last of the ill-fated ship in which he had taken the initiative of his profession, and which, young though he were, had already afforded him such terrible experiences of the perils and horrors which belong to a nautical career.

From the direction where the Catharine Millard had gone down, the youth's eyes were again turned towards the superb ship in the distance: his judgment was correct—it was a large two-decker, carrying the English flag. And now, O joy again! his signal was answered. The ship's course was slightly altered; and he knew that it was for his sake. At length he beheld a speck upon the



surface of the sea between himself and that man-of-war: it was the boat that was coming to his assistance. His energies maintained him until that boat was close up with him: he was taken on board—a few fervid words of gratitude escaped his lips—and he fainted.

When he returned to consciousness, he was being lifted from the boat up the high towering side of that floating castle; and he was at once borne to a comfortable berth. Every attention was shown him; and when he gave particulars of the shipwreck, boats were despatched in every direction in the hope of picking up some of the crew of the ill-fated Catharine Millard. But none were found; and thus every circumstance seemed to ratify the dread idea which young Barrington had from the first formed—namely, that they had all been engulfed in the depths of the angry ocean.

The man-of-war was cruising amidst the West
No. 16.—AGNES.

India Island, to which station it belonged; and therefore it was not inconvenient for the Captain to run to Kingston in Jamaica, to land Gustavus there. He had two motives in begging to be taken to that destination. In the first place, it was the destination of the Catharine Millard; and if any of the crew had by a chance escaped, they would find their way thither. In the second place, there was at Kingston a correspondent of the firm to which the ill-fated vessel had belonged; and through that gentleman's agency Gustavus hoped to be enabled to obtain a berth in some ship to England. We should add that during the short time that he was on board the British man-of-war, his gentlemanly bearing—his intellectual yet unpretending discourse—the sympathy created by his tale—and the admiration which his heroic conduct inspired (for of this last there was sufficient evidence in the manner in which he had been found) won for him the esteem and friendship of all the

officers. As he had lost everything by the shipwreck, they generously made a subscription of fifty guineas, which they presented to him in a manner alike so delicate and friendly that he could not possibly decline that tribute of their good feeling. When he parted from them, he was accompanied by their best wishes; and the Captain furnished him with a certificate in proof of the circumstances under which he had been picked up, so that the correspondent of the London firm of Millard and Co. might not entertain any doubt as to the truth of the narrative which he had to tell.

It was at about five o'clock in the evening on the fourth day after he had been so providentially rescued from the perils of a watery grave, that Gustavus Barrington was landed from the ship-of-war at Kingston. He speedily found the commercial establishment of Mr. Pinnoek: but this merchant had gone to his country-house, which was about three miles off. Gustavus deemed it his duty to report with the least possible delay the loss of the Catharine Millard; and he therefore obtained a vehicle to take him to Mr. Pinnoek's residence.

On arriving there, he was at once conducted into an apartment, where an elderly gentleman and a young female were seated at a table covered with wines and fruits. The elderly gentleman was lounging at an open window near to which the table was drawn; and he was smoking a cigar. There was not a very strong light in the room; and the glance which Gustavus threw upon the young female, showed him that she had a very dusky complexion, as if she were a quadroon or mulatto.

Gustavus was well dressed, in a suit of plain clothes which had been furnished him by one of the young officers on board the English ship-of-war; and thus his gentlemanly bearing was at once a passport to a favourable reception. Mr. Pinnoek—who in business hours was precise, reserved, and active—in his leisure hours was good-humoured, hospitable, and indolent. He bade his visitor be seated, and at once helped him to wine before having learnt anything beyond his name, which the domestic had announced. Gustavus however soon entered into particulars by describing who he was, explaining the total loss of the Catharine Millard, and giving a few hastily-sketched details of his own miraculous escape. He then produced the certificate furnished him by the Captain of the British man-of-war, and with whose handwriting Mr. Pinnoek happened to be acquainted.

While the merchant was occupied in perusing that certificate, Gustavus, in looking round the apartment, again settled his eyes for an instant upon the young female, whose presence indeed he had almost forgotten while telling his tale to Mr. Pinnoek. For this young female was engaged in some light needle-work at the time Barrington entered; and having just glanced at him for a moment, her eyes sank upon the work again. She spoke not a syllable; and when Gustavus now once more looked at her, she was still engaged with her needle as attentively as before. He could not very well distinguish her features, in consequence of the light and the way in which her head was bent forward: but a glance at her figure conveyed the impression that the light

dress which she wore defined a well-modelled shape.

"Nothing can be more regular, Mr. Barrington," said the merchant, "than this guarantee of the truth of your narrative. The Captain of the British ship, I observe, is careful in noting that a barrel attached to the planks which bore you, had the letters C. M. upon it; and C. M.," he added with a smile, "stands for *Catharine Millard*. The poor ship is gone; and the underwriters in England will suffer. The circumstance is an unfortunate one for you, young gentleman: but still you must be thankful that you have escaped with your life. I must see what is best to be done for you. Meanwhile take some wine—help yourself to fruit—here are choice cigars—and now tell me more at length the particulars of your marvellous escape."

Gustavus accepted the hospitable invitations to address himself to the refreshments; but he hesitated to light a cigar, on the ground "that it might be disagreeable to the young lady."

"Oh, not at all, I can assure you," she said, now speaking for the first time since Gustavus had entered the room: and the richness of her voice, which seemed full of a golden harmony, flowed upon his ear with an effect that was for an instant startling and then enrapturing.

It was startling, because, though soft and low, it nevertheless had that fulness of melody which we have just endeavoured to illustrate by the sound of the most precious metal; and Gustavus was astonished that such a delicious voice, with such purity of accent and such lady-like intonation, should have emanated from the lips of a mulatto whose countenance he was more than half prepared to find of a repulsive ugliness. She raised that countenance at the same time that she spoke—but only for an instant. Yet those were assuredly fine large lustrous black eyes which flung their looks upon Gustavus; and it struck him that she was not altogether so *very* ugly, though he still could not rightly distinguish her features.

"Oh, Emily does not care about smoke," exclaimed Mr. Pinnoek. "She is my niece, Mr. Barrington—a good girl enough—and as I am an old bachelor, she superintends my household. I ought perhaps to have introduced you. However, better late than never. Mr. Barrington—Miss Pinnoek."

Gustavus bowed—the young lady slightly inclined her head; and then the merchant repeated his demand for a detailed account of the youth's escape. Gustavus commenced the tale; and in order to explain how it happened that he was left on board the ship when it was abandoned by the Captain, the crew, and the passengers, he was compelled to recite the episode connected with the old miser Elverstone. This episode his modesty would naturally have induced him to suppress, or at least to cut very short, inasmuch as he could not be otherwise than aware that in its main features it spoke most favourably for his own conduct. As he had once commenced he was compelled to go on; and Mr. Pinnoek put so many leading questions that every detail was at length elicited. Warm were the praises bestowed by Mr. Pinnoek; and as Gustavus happened to glance towards Miss Emily, he observed that the work had fallen upon her lap; and her large black eyes were fixed ear-

restly upon him as if expressive of the deepest interest in his recital.

Those eyes were instantaneously withdrawn—the work was snatched up again—the dusky countenance was bent down over it; and all this took place so suddenly that Gustavus was for a few instants bewildered whether the bright eyes had really been fixed upon him at all, or whether it were not a delusion on his own part. But again his looks wandered slowly over the shape which the light dress defined; and he became convinced that it was one of no ordinary symmetry that he was thus regarding. A fine bust and a slender waist were undoubtedly possessed by Emily Pinnoek: and now, as the looks of Gustavus were bent lower, they settled upon a foot of the most exquisite shapeliness which, together with a portion of a well-rounded ankle, peeped forth from beneath the skirt of that dress. The well-made shoe and the well-fitting silken hose delineated the modelling of that foot and ankle; and Gustavus was now beginning to think that Emily Pinnoek must be a little more worthy of his attention than he had at first supposed. But still he could form no positive idea of the outlines of her profile or the general contours of her lineaments.

“Well, Mr. Barrington,” said Mr. Pinnoek, “you have suffered great hardships, and you have displayed a remarkable courage throughout a most painful ordeal. It would be my duty in any case, for the sake of my friends the Millards in London, to show every attention to one who has suffered while engaged in their service: but in the present instance there is something more than mere duty—it is with an unfeigned pleasure—However, I hate long rhodomontading speeches; and therefore to come to the point at once, you must make this house your home for as long as you like, and I will do all I can to further your views hereafter.”

“I will certainly accept your kind hospitality, Mr. Pinnoek,” replied Gustavus, “until through your generous assistance I may obtain a berth in another ship—”

“Well, well,” interrupted the merchant, “we shall see all about that. Emily, my dear, Mr. Barrington is our guest: go and make all requisite arrangements.”

Emily at once rose from her seat: but as she turned abruptly round at the same instant to deposit her work in the drawer of a little side-table, Gustavus again failed to catch a distinct view of her features: and he could not help thinking within himself, “*She must be ugly after all!* Poor girl, she knows it, and she studies to conceal her countenance as much as possible from the gaze of a stranger!”

But while making these reflections, the youth was following Miss Pinnoek with his eyes as she advanced towards the door; and if his mind were again filled with painful misgivings in respect to her countenance, it at least entertained no doubt concerning the admirable symmetry of her form. She was tall and upright; but this reed-like straightness was utterly apart from stiffness. On the contrary, there was an elegant ease and graceful flexibility of the entire figure, as she walked, which gave additional charms to the excellence of that symmetry. She had broad shoulders, but a

slender waist; and the sweeping length of her limbs indicated their flowing outlines beneath the light dress which she wore: for this dress was scanty enough on account of the heat of that West Indian climate. The neck was long and arching: the head was admirably poised upon it; and luxuriant masses of coal-black hair descended upon the finely sloping shoulders. The skirt of the dress being rather short, not merely revealed the beautifully-shaped feet and ankles, but for a moment afforded a glimpse of a leg that was modelled to the perfect symmetry of a statue. The next instant the door closed behind Miss Pinnoek: but she disappeared without once turning her face towards the table—so that Gustavus found himself heaving a sigh as he inwardly thought, “What a pity it is that so splendid a figure should be so ill-matched with an ugly face!—for ugly I am convinced she is!”

Mr. Pinnoek lighted another cigar—compelled his young guest to follow his example—passed round the wine—and continued to descant upon the loss of the Catharine Millard, or to ask fresh questions upon the subject. Another hour thus went by: but Emily returned not to the room. Gustavus was wishing that she would, though he could not rightly understand why—unless it were that he experienced the utmost curiosity to have a full view of her countenance. At length Mr. Pinnoek rose from the table, and offered to conduct the youth to the chamber which had by this time been prepared for him. It was therefore evident that Miss Emily had retired for the night; and there was something that bordered upon a feeling of disappointment in the youth’s mind that she did not reappear, even if only for a few instants.

“I am going into Kingston early in the morning,” said Mr. Pinnoek, as he shook hands with Gustavus at the door of the chamber to which he conducted him; “and as you will no doubt like to look over the town and the shipping, you can accompany me. Breakfast will be served at about half-past eight o’clock.”

Young Barrington retired to rest; and he soon fell asleep to dream of shipwrecks, the old miser and his gold, his cousin Winifred, his grandfather in Whitecross Street prison, and Emily Pinnoek, whom his fancy depicted with the most elegant of figures and the ugliest of faces. His imagination was at first erratic in these visions: but it presently began to settle itself more and more on the last-mentioned object. He dreamt that he was entering the room where he had passed the evening with Mr. Pinnoek and his niece—and that on crossing the threshold, he perceived the latter standing at a casement with her back towards him. He fancied that he stood to admire that shape in which elegance of symmetry, gracefulness of carriage, and youthful elasticity blended with a voluptuous richness of contours. He thought that after a little while he advanced farther into the room—that the sounds of his footsteps fell upon Miss Emily’s ear—and that with a sudden start she turned round towards him. And now he fancied that he obtained a full view of her countenance; and a sensation of pain, sorrow, and disgust seized upon him—for his imagination depicted that face as being deeply scarred with the ravages of the small-pox, the marks looking all the

more hideous on account of their hue being different from the duskiuess of her quadroon complexion. He thought too that a broad flat nose, great coarse thick lips, and a set of loathsomely decayed teeth, completed the picture of this ugliness, and rendered it absolutely revolting. It is true that in imagination he again beheld a remarkably fine pair of large lustrous black eyes: but it appeared to him that instead of in the slightest degree redeeming the intense ugliness of the face, they only threw it into a more hideous relief by the strength of contrast and by the light which those luminous eyes shed upon all the features.

Such was the dream of Gustavus; and so strong an impression did it make upon his mind, that when he awoke in the morning he felt convinced that though it were but a vision, it had depicted the reality so far as Emily Pinnoek was concerned. He therefore thought within himself that he must after all have attained a better view of her face the preceding evening than he could possibly recollect to have done—and that the dream had repeated, but in a more vivid manner, the impression that was made upon him at the time. Still he wondered that on retiring to rest he had not been enabled to form a better idea of Miss Pinnoek's lineaments than he had done; and thus, though there was some little perplexity in his brain, he had no doubt with regard to the main prominent fact, that the merchant's niece was in reality possessed of a very superb figure, endowed with all the softest graces and the most voluptuous charms, but that she was unfortunately cursed with a revolting ugliness of countenance.

Having performed his toilet, he descended to the apartment where he had spent the preceding evening, and where he now expected to have all his ideas in respect to Emily completely confirmed by meeting her there. But he found Mr. Pinnoek only in the room; and this gentleman welcomed him with the most cordial hospitality. The table was spread with all kinds of tempting viands, near the open window; and the merchant, at once sitting down, bade his guest be seated also. Gustavus flung a glance over the table; and he perceived that the arrangements were only made for two persons: it was therefore evident that Miss Emily was not to join them at the morning meal.

"My niece," said Mr. Pinnoek, in the course of conversation, "is an early riser, and she usually takes her breakfast long before I do. She gets out for a ramble before the heat of the day sets in—and besides, my young friend, you must not think it any ill compliment to you that she is not here to preside at the breakfast-table after the fashion of Old England: but she is very bashful—we live a retired sort of life—and she sees few strangers."

Gustavus expressed the hope that his presence at Mr. Pinnoek's abode might in no sense cause any embarrassment; and he thought it only proper to add that while in one sense he was pleased to find Miss Pinnoek did not adopt any formalities on his account, yet that the absence of the lady of the house from the table must necessarily always be a source of regret to those who were partaking of its hospitalities.

"Emily is a good girl," said Mr. Pinnoek; "and when you come to know her better, you will

like her. I dare say that when her bashfulness wears off in respect to yourself—you being a stranger—you will become very good friends together: for I can tell you candidly that I don't mean to part with you in a hurry—I shall endeavour to indemnify you by two or three weeks of rest and recreation for the hardships and sufferings you have endured."

Having thus spoken in a benevolent and good-humoured manner, Mr. Pinnoek jumped up from table: for a neat little chaise had just driven round to the front of the residence. Gustavus followed the merchant from the house; and without seeing anything of Emily, he took his seat in the vehicle. Kingston was soon reached; the merchant and the youth alighted at the door of the former gentleman's business-establishment; and they entered the counting-house.

"Now, my young friend," said Mr. Pinnoek, "before you go out to amuse yourself, you and I have a little business to transact together. You have lost everything by the shipwreck—and therefore you are in want of everything. I am going to write you a cheque—I shan't charge it to Millard and Co.—it is simply a matter betwixt you and me—and when you are a rich man," added Mr. Pinnoek with a good-natured laugh, "you shall repay me—and not before."

He was accustomed, in those moods when relaxing from the severer considerations of business, to speak at times with great volubility; and that speech had been made with such rapidity that Gustavus could not possibly edge in a word. He however at length found an opportunity to explain that he was in no want of funds; and he acquainted Mr. Pinnoek with the handsome conduct of the officers on board the ship-of-war, as well as the delicate manner in which the gift had been bestowed upon him.

"Very well, then," said the merchant, "you require no money at present: but remember that when you do, I shall be most happy to act as your banker. Now go and see whatsoever is worth seeing. If you find your way home to Mount Pleasant—which is the name of my suburban residence—before I am ready to return, well and good: but if not, the chaise will be here at four o'clock, and you can accompany me."

Gustavus thanked the kind-hearted merchant for all the favours that he was receiving at his hands; and he issued forth from the counting-house. He wandered about for some two or three hours, amusing himself by the inspection of all that was worth seeing in the capital of Jamaica; but as it is not the purpose of this story to digress into topographical descriptions, we shall not pause to depict the leading features of Kingston.

After a while Gustavus began to think that it would be as well if he commenced giving his orders and making his purchases for the reconstruction of his wardrobe. He accordingly visited several shops, buying shirts, hose, and handkerchiefs at one—ordering clothes at another—boots and shoes at a third. Toilet necessities were not forgotten; and finally young Barrington entered a linen-draper's repository to buy gloves, which he had hitherto forgotten. He was standing at the counter, paying for the articles he had purchased, when he beheld a well-dressed young lady stop for an instant at the window and fix her eyes upon

some of the goods there displayed. She was of dark complexion; but though the duskiness of her skin was that of the olive hue, it had none of the disagreeable sallowness which usually blends so damagingly with the deep tint of the brunetta. She was singularly beautiful: her profile, delicately aquiline, was perfection itself; and there was a certain haughtiness in the expression of her exquisitely formed mouth. The lips were of the richest red—the upper one slightly fuller than the lower; and as they were apart at the moment, they afforded a glimpse of teeth of ivory whiteness. The eyes were large, luminous, and remarkably handsome; their ebony fringes, though long and thick, could not curtain the brilliancy of the rays which those orbs shut forth. It was only for a few instants that this young lady—whose age appeared to be about nineteen or twenty—lingered at the window of the linendraper's shop; and then she was gone.

Gustavus Barrington was much struck by that exceedingly handsome countenance of which he had thus caught but a transient glimpse,—yet a glimpse sufficient to leave upon his mind the full impression of its extraordinary beauty. He hastily gathered up the change which lay upon the counter, and left the shop somewhat precipitately; for he longed to obtain another view of that young lady and satisfy himself whether the beauty of her shape corresponded with that of her features. He sped along the street—he overtook and passed several young ladies of a dusky complexion—but not one proved to be the cynosure whom he sought. He did not remember how she was dressed—though the impression made upon his mind at the moment he had caught the first glimpse of her at the shop-window, was that her apparel was indicative of gentility and taste. He beheld several ladies whose raiment had these characteristics: he hastened after them—passed—and looked round when he might do so without rudeness: but still he discovered not the object of his interest.

"She is marvellously handsome!" he said to himself, as he at length desisted from his vain search—and it was with a feeling of disappointment that he did so. "If she possess a figure as fine as Emily Pinnoek's, she must be the most splendid woman in creation, notwithstanding the duskiness of her complexion. Ah! if Emily herself were only blest with such a countenance, she would not be so anxious to hide it with what her uncle in his fondness terms her bashfulness!"

Gustavus continued to roam about Kingston, endeavouring to persuade himself that there were plenty of objects of interest yet to contemplate—though it was in reality with the secret hope of again encountering the possessor of the handsome face which he had seen through the shop-window. He did not for an instant imagine that he was in reality already enamoured of that countenance: he believed that it was mere curiosity; for he fancied that he never could love any one as much as he loved his cousin Winifred. But here we may as well observe that when the two cousins had parted in England nearly a couple of years back, there had been no avowal of a tender attachment between them; and yet when they had embraced over and over again, they had both felt that there was something in their hearts to which they longed to give utterance with their lips—some

feeling which they yearned to shape in language: but yet they had not done so! They were then as young!—and even in the midst of their intense grief there was diffidence and bashfulness. They had therefore parted without forming any verbal engagement, and yet with some kind of sympathetic intuitive feeling that they loved each other and were bound by ties of a stronger and more tender character than those of mere kinship. And thus, while voyaging upon the wild ocean, Gustavus had always thought of Winnie as a being dearer to him than a cousin only, though he had never so far settled his reflections as to give way to such serious deliberation on the point as to say within himself, "Winifred will some day become my wife!"

We have recorded these few little explanations for the purpose of showing that although Gustavus dearly loved his cousin Winifred, and had constantly thought of her since the painful moment of their separation, yet that he had never come to a conclusion so pointed and so matter-of-fact as to look upon himself as her future husband. It was an indefinite, unstudied, and unanalysed feeling that he entertained towards her: and thus while now thinking of the handsome mulatto countenance which had caught his view through the linendraper's shop-window, it did not for a moment strike him that he was entertaining a thought at all traitorous or perfidious towards his absent cousin Winnie. Yet that countenance was now deeply impressed upon his mind: and he caught himself frequently reiterating the wish, "Oh, if Emily Pinnoek, with her splendid figure only possessed that beautiful face!"

At length Gustavus was warned by a reference to his watch—which was amongst the articles he had been purchasing—that it was time to rejoin Mr. Pinnoek at his counting-house. Thither he accordingly repaired: a few minutes afterwards the chaise was at the door; and they took their seats in the vehicle. Mr. Pinnoek, who had been all sedateness and seriousness during the hours of business, now resumed his natural hilarity and good temper as easily as if it were a different garment that he was putting on. He chatted blithely—pointed out various aspects of interest as they passed along—and vowed that he had an excellent appetite for the dinner which they should find ready to be served up on their arrival at Mount Pleasant. But before they reached their destination a little incident occurred which we must mention.

As there was plenty of time until the dinner-hour, Mr. Pinnoek had driven out of the direct road, and made a circuit in order to show Gustavus the boundary of the estate which he possessed. In one part the road wound for a space near the sea-shore; and it was at a point where the route turned inland again, that the chaise was passed by an individual who was on foot, walking slowly in the contrary direction. So far as Gustavus could judge of him, he was a middle-aged man, with grey hair—tall and thin—dressed slovenly, and even shabbily.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hargrave," said Mr. Pinnoek, as the chaise swept round the corner.

The individual thus spoken to, merely made a sign of recognition, which was more curt than courteous: and he continued his way.

"I have shown you many objects of interest which, as artists would say, belong to nature or to still life," answered Mr. Pinnock: "but now you have just seen a human peculiarity."

"You called him Mr. Hargrave, I think?" said young Barrington.

"Yes—that is the name by which he is known in these parts," replied the merchant; "though I am sure I cannot tell you how it was ever discovered—for he never opens his lips to speak to a soul. Ah! perhaps when he took the little cottage yonder, he must have given a name to the owner? Of course he must!—that is how it transpired. It never struck me before!"—and the worthy merchant looked as if he were highly pleased at the discovery he had just made.

"But who is Mr. Hargrave?" inquired Barrington, becoming interested; for it was evident there was some degree of mystery attached to that individual.

"To speak positively," rejoined Mr. Pinnock, "no one knows for certain: but if I may hazard a conjecture, he is some poor crack-brained gentleman whose reason has been unsettled by misfortunes—I will not be so uncharitable as to suggest the probability of *crimes*."

"How long has he been living in this neighbourhood?" asked Gustavus.

"Some two or three years," was the merchant's response. "I think I have heard he came from New Orleans: but I scarcely take him to be a Yankee by birth—though I'm sure I know not why I should say so. Our intercourse has never extended any further than the slight exchange of civilities which you have just seen pass between us—"

"Or rather, I should say," interrupted Gustavus, "a civility on your part and an uncouth coarseness on his."

"Well, well, it may be so," said the good-natured merchant: "but as he is unmistakably wrong in the upper storey, we must make allowances for him. He is a strange being. No one seems to know how he lives; for according to all report he never receives any remittances through any agent in Kingston—and yet from all I hear, he honourably pays his way and owes no one a shilling. But then his expenses are trivial enough: they are next to nothing; for he lives by himself in a hermit-like fashion—with an old deaf and dumb nigger, who inhabits a neighbouring hut, to do what is requisite in the shape of his household affairs."

"You are describing to me a singular character," observed Gustavus.

"Yes—but I ought to add," said Mr. Pinnock, "that he evidently possesses good traits—for he is remarkably fond of children. He distributes pence amongst them—he will watch them at their sports—but he never speaks to them. They themselves are afraid of him, notwithstanding his kindness: for the folly of parents amongst the ignorant orders, you know, often makes a bogie of any individual of peculiar and eccentric habits, and whom people in reality know nothing at all about. But here we are at home."

Gustavus had been so absorbed in the interest of this conversation that he had not noticed how near they had been drawing towards Mount Pleasant. They now alighted; and young Bar-

ington hastened up to his chamber to make some change in his toilet for the dinner-table—and for which purpose he had now the means, inasmuch as the articles he had purchased at Kingston had been sent home.

CHAPTER XXII.

EMILY PINNOCK.

ON repairing to the dining-room, Gustavus Barrington found Mr. Pinnock impatient to sit down to the repast which was spread upon the table,—while his niece Emily was bending over some plants that were placed on an ornamental stand in one of the open casements. Her back was towards the youth as he crossed the threshold: but again was he struck by the admirable symmetry of her shape and the perfect modelling of her feet and ankles.

"Come, my dear Mr. Barrington!" exclaimed the merchant: "I am sure you must have a good appetite—unless indeed you lunched in Kingston! By the bye, Emily was there for an hour or two, engaged in shopping; and I wonder you did not meet."

At this moment Miss Pinnock turned away from the window; and as Gustavus had not met her in the morning at the breakfast-table, he was hastening to pay his respects to her, when he now for the first time within the walls of that dwelling caught a complete view of her countenance. For an instant he stopped short in amazement,—his heart at the same time being seized with a sudden palpitation, produced by the blending influences of joy and uncertainty: then he looked again—and there was no longer a doubt in his mind; for the countenance which he was now contemplating with rapture was the same which he had beheld through the tradesman's shop-window in Kingston.

It was well for him that Mr. Pinnock was already settling himself at the dinner-table, or he could not have failed to observe the various emotions which his youthful guest thus displayed. But Miss Pinnock *did* perceive them; and her large luminous black eyes were fixed upon Gustavus for an instant, ere with her habitual bashfulness she turned away and glided towards her seat. Young Barrington now recovered his self-possession: but his heart continued to palpitate, and almost to leap within him, at the circumstance which had just so strangely revealed itself. For, after all, his dream was an utter delusion! Instead of the flat nose and the coarse thick lips which the image of his vision had presented to his view, he beheld a faultless profile, delicately aquiline—the lips exquisitely formed, and of the richest redness. Instead of cheeks marked and seared with the ravages of the small-pox, he beheld a skin that seemed to be of velvet softness, and through the duskiness of which the warm blood mantled in blushes. Finally, instead of a set of loathsomely decayed teeth, he beheld two rows of polished ivory,—teeth indeed that were of perfect beauty, well-shaped, and faultlessly even. Yes—this was Emily Pinnock, who with that handsome countenance and that beautiful figure constituted the

loveliest creature that ever the eyes of Gustavus had rested upon!

On the preceding evening he had addressed little or none of his conversation to the young lady; but now it was chiefly to her that he spoke; and he found that as her bashfulness towards a stranger was gradually wearing off, she answered him at greater length and presently began to make comments of her own, so that the conversation should not be altogether sustained by himself. And he found likewise that she ventured to look at him with less constraint and confusion than at first. The impression that she was amiable, intelligent, and accomplished stole upon him by degrees; and by the time the dessert was placed upon the table, he was completely under the influence of the many fascinations which the young lady possessed. When he retired to his chamber that evening, it was to dream of Emily Pinnock—but in a manner very different from that in which she had appeared to him in the vision of the preceding night.

He arose at an early hour in the morning, in the hope that as she was accustomed to breakfast before her uncle, he might be permitted to take his own meal in her company: and this hope was realized. They sat down to table together: she was far less constrained or embarrassed than even when they had separated on the previous day: she began to treat Gustavus with that friendliness which blends with courtesy on the part of a host or hostess towards a guest; and he saw that Mr. Pinnock's prophecy had every chance of being fulfilled, to the effect that when they came to know each other better they would be very good friends. When Mr. Pinnock himself made his appearance, he inquired if Gustavus purposed to accompany him into Kingston: but the youth expressed a wish to ramble amidst the adjacent scenery—though he spoke with some little confusion and hesitation.

"My dear young friend," exclaimed the good-natured merchant, "pray do whatever you think fit. It is my desire to render your sojourn amongst us as agreeable as possible, and not to be any restraint upon your actions. I dare say Emily will presently show you whatever features of attraction there are upon the estate:—or if you like to roam about by yourself, she will not think it any ill compliment."

While the merchant was giving utterance to the concluding portion of his speech, Emily had again bent down over her favourite flowers; and her uncle issued from the room as the chaise was now at the door. For a few minutes after his departure, there was silence in the breakfast-parlour; for Gustavus felt somewhat embarrassed—he wished to have Miss Emily's society in his proposed ramble, but he scarcely dared ask for it. She on her part had heard what Mr. Pinnock said: but she was too much embarrassed to proffer the fulfilment of the suggestion he had thrown out. Thus she was bending over the flowers, the long rich tresses of her coal-black hair drooping down to the leaves and buds which she appeared to be contemplating, but her posture defining all the flowing outlines of her symmetrical and somewhat voluptuous shape. At length Gustavus, feeling that this silence could endure no longer, plucked up his courage as well as he could—

though it was still with some degree of hesitation, stammering, and faltering, that he said, "If it would be agreeable to you, Miss Pinnock—if you have nothing better to do—and if it will not be taking you away from any duties in-doors—I should be honoured and flattered by your company for a ramble."

"Ob, with much pleasure!" she replied, raising her head and for a moment bending her looks upon young Barrington, while her ivory teeth were revealed by the affable smile of her lips.

She hastened from the parlour; and in a few minutes she was ready for the pedestrian excursion. She was dressed with great simplicity though with exceeding neatness: the apparel she wore set off her dusky beauty and her fine shape to their fullest advantage; so that Gustavus thought she looked even more fascinating as well as more strikingly handsome than when she was dressed with greater richness and elegance at the time he beheld her in Kingston on the preceding day.

They walked forth together; and the circumstances of the ramble tended to enhance their mutual friendliness of manner and to smooth down the formalities of mere courtesy into something like intimacy. There were occasionally difficult paths to take or little bridges to cross; and Gustavus was ready to give his hand to the young lady,—though these attentions were indeed far from necessary, inasmuch as she was familiar with every inch of the ground over which they were walking. They visited the huts where dwelt the free negro families that laboured upon the estate: Miss Emily had a kind word for every one,—though at the same time she maintained a certain degree of dignity; and Gustavus perceived that there was some amount of pride in her disposition,—a pride that at any moment could change into hauteur, so that the expression of her countenance was not altogether unreflecting of the phases of her mind. Towards those whom she knew well, there was no bashfulness in her manner—no restraint, no reserve: and Barrington therefore comprehended that it was only towards strangers who might be either her equals or her superiors, that she experienced any awkwardness until she came to know them well.

As they were pursuing their walk, they presently came to a spot where some dozen of little black children were deporting together; and at a short distance stood Mr. Hargrave, the misanthropic individual whom Gustavus had seen on the preceding day. He was leaning against a tree, with his arms folded across his chest, and surveying the children as they were engaged in their sports. He was motionless as a statue: his eyes were riveted upon the little swarm of negro juveniles: and he did not appear to observe the approach of Miss Pinnock and her companion. They advanced near enough to mark the expression of his countenance; and Gustavus could now perceive that it was filled with a profound melancholy,—with which however a certain bitterness and also vacancy were blended; so that the youth was more than ever impressed with the belief that the unfortunate gentleman could not be altogether right in his mind. We have already said that Mr. Hargrave was tall and thin, and he had grey hair. Handsome he could never have been in the strict

acceptance of the term: but that in his more youthful period he might have merited the less positive epithet of "good-looking," was quite possible. He had dark eyes which shone brightly; and once, when for an instant he smiled at some peculiar antic on the part of one of the black children, he displayed a fine set of teeth.

"I saw that gentleman yesterday," said Gustavus in a low tone to Miss Pinnock. "Your uncle told me of his peculiarities and eccentricities—"

"Yes—he is a very strange being," responded Emily. "He always bows to me with a sufficient degree of courtesy: but we have never yet exchanged a syllable. Ah, he notices us now!"

At that instant Mr. Hargrave suddenly started from his motionless attitude against the tree: and lifting his hat to Miss Pinnock, he turned away: walking slowly along, like one who was in profound thought, he was soon lost to the view amidst the neighbouring trees.

Gustavus and Emily pursued their ramble; and presently the young lady pointed out to her companion a small cottage and a still more diminutive hut, which stood in the midst of a little garden. These were respectively the habitations of Mr. Hargrave and the old negro who attended to his household affairs.

While returning from their walk, Gustavus and Emily perceived a tall black man approaching. He was a finely-built, athletic fellow, with a form that would have served admirably as a model for the statue of a gladiator; but his countenance, having the true African stamp of features, was by no means equally deserving of commendation.

As this negro advanced, Gustavus observed that Emily drew closer to his side; and as he offered his arm—which he had not hitherto done—she at once took it. He even fancied that she clung to him as if in some sort feeling that it was to the arm of a protector; and he was struck by the idea that she had some great and powerful reason for entertaining an apprehension on account of that individual.

The negro slackened his pace as he advanced; and though he made a profoundly respectful salutation, yet his looks were for a moment flung upon Emily in a manner which Gustavus conceived to be sinister though incomprehensible. They were looks which might have indicated either a fierce vindictive resentment or else the burning desire of lustful passion—but which it was the youth could not in his own mind determine.

"Good morning, Nelson," said Miss Emily, as she and Gustavus passed the tall, strong-built negro: and these few words were in acknowledgment of the respectful salutation he had made.

"Does that man belong to Mr. Pinnock's estate?" inquired Gustavus, when he and Emily were at a little distance from the spot where they had passed the negro.

"No," she replied: "he belongs to the neighbouring estate—but he has acquaintances amongst my uncle's people; and besides, he is often sent on our plantation with messages from his master."

"Pardon the observation, Miss Pinnock," said Gustavus, after a moment's pause, "but methought you liked not altogether the presence of that man?"

Emily did not immediately give any reply:

but at the expiration of a few moments she said, with the candid tone of one suddenly resolving to unbosom herself to a friend, "I confess you are right, Mr. Barrington. And yet I know not how it is—perhaps I am very foolish—but to speak frankly, I never behold that man without an indescribable sensation of terror creeping over me. Yet his conduct has always been respectful enough—and therefore I suppose it must be on account of something in his looks. They are looks which I do not dare meet: I hurry past him without venturing to raise my eyes, and yet with a feeling as if I thus incurred the danger of being suddenly seized upon by him unawares. Now I am certain you will consider me a very silly girl!"

"Heaven forbid, Miss Pinnock!" ejaculated Gustavus, with much earnestness: "for though our acquaintance has been so short, yet I have with increasing pleasure discovered that you are intelligent."

The hand which hitherto had rested upon the youth's arm since Emily first took it when the negro appeared in sight, was now gently withdrawn; and as her looks were bent downward, Gustavus could not catch a glimpse of her countenance.

"Perhaps she thinks I am flattering her," he said within himself; "and she is offended?—Miss Pinnock," he continued, addressing himself to the young lady, "I know that you are too intelligent to be alarmed without a cause; and I will confess that there was something in that man's looks as we passed him which I did not like."

"Ah, you thought so?" exclaimed Emily, now suddenly raising her countenance: and there was nothing in its expression to justify Barrington's fear that she was offended. "Then you consider that it is really not altogether without just grounds that I have conceived an aversion for that man?"

"So far from it," rejoined Gustavus, with a serious energy, "that I entreat you to beware of him."

"Good heavens, Mr. Barrington!" exclaimed Miss Pinnock; "you are now indeed completely confirming all my apprehensions! Yet why should I be afraid of him? I have never done him an injury—I have always endeavoured to speak civilly to him, as you just now heard me—and he would be very wicked to think of doing me a mischief."

There was so much unaffected candour and artlessness in this speech that it afforded the strongest possible proof of the innocence of the young lady's mind. She was evidently in fear of Nelson's malignity only: her thoughts were too pure to suggest that her beauty might have inflamed his passions and that her person was the object of his lust.

Therefore, while Gustavus discovered in Miss Pinnock a new trait to excite his admiration, he was on the other hand firmly convinced that the looks, at first so incomprehensible, which the negro had bent upon her, were indeed expressive of the desires with which his soul was inflamed.

But while he repeated the warning that Emily should be on her guard against any evil that Nelson might be capable of towards her, he was careful to avoid the slightest hint which by enlightening her in respect to the real nature of the danger which she had to apprehend, might shock the delicacy of her mind and enlarge the range of her thoughts which by virgin chastity were circumscribed.



Several days passed; and Gustavus was thrown much into the society of Miss Pinnock. They walked out together; and when they were indoors, he sat reading to her while she was at her work. All bashfulness, awkwardness, and confusion were banished on both sides; and an intimacy was springing up. Indeed, Gustavus thought that he was learning to regard Emily Pinnock with the sincerity of friendship; while she on her own side entertained a similar impression. Mr. Pinnock seemed well pleased that they were getting to be such good friends: for, as he declared, it delighted him to find that Gustavus was enjoying himself at Mount Pleasant and that Emily did not suffer the time to hang heavily on his hands.

But one day—at the expiration of a week after Berrington's arrival at the merchant's hospitable abode—Emily was compelled to go into Kingston on a shopping excursion; and as she said nothing to encourage Gustavus to offer to accompany her,

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he dared not make the proposal—for he fancied that she would rather be alone when engaged in such a pursuit. He accordingly rambled forth by himself: but he felt as if his spirits had experienced a cause for depression—as if the walk could not possibly be agreeable without the presence of his usual companion. It was therefore almost in a melancholy mood that he wandered along, listless and indifferent with regard to the direction which he was taking. He presently found himself upon the sea-shore, at no great distance from the spot where he had first met Mr. Hargrave. Gustavus sat down to contemplate that wide expanse of sea now reposing in a tranquillity which was unbroken by even a single ripple, but which only a week back had been so furiously agitated by the demon of the storm. Gustavus sought to rivet his attention upon that ocean that he might poetically apostrophise it in reproachfulness for its treachery; but his thoughts kept re-

verting to Emily. He had seen her set off for Kingston, in the chaise which had been sent to bear her thither: she was again dressed with mingled richness and elegance—and he could not determine whether he most admired her in this latter garb, or in that apparel which she habitually wore and which was characterized by so much neatness and simplicity. Indeed, he fancied that in either way she was eminently handsome and fascinatingly beautiful,—though he frequently said to himself, “But I do not the less love my dear cousin Winnie! Oh, no!—I never can love any one better than Winnie! Besides, she is a relation—while Emily Pinnock is only a friend!”

While Gustavus was thus engaged in contemplating the ocean—but with his thoughts chiefly fixed upon Emily Pinnock, with an occasional reference to his cousin Winifred—he perceived some dark object floating near the shore at a little distance. At first he fancied that it was a piece of timber: and indeed for some time he scarcely devoted any particular consideration to the object at all: but at length the idea gradually began stealing in unto his mind that it was a corpse which he thus beheld. He rose and advanced towards it; and it was now so close upon the shore that his suspicion was at once confirmed. It was indeed a corpse! Gustavus forthwith proceeded to drag it upon the strand; and then he found it to be the body of the old miser Elverstone. But so disfigured were the remains of the deceased—so hideously loathsome was its countenance, on which the fishes had banqueted—that it was only by the apparel the youth was enabled to establish the identity.

Yes—the corpse of Elverstone it assuredly was!—for there, beneath the outer garment, were the leathern bags in which the avaricious old man had disposed of his gold. Gustavus recoiled from the revolting spectacle; and as he turned aside, he beheld Mr. Hargrave standing at a short distance, steadfastly looking on with his arms folded across his breast.

“The sea gives up its dead,” said Mr. Hargrave, in a low deep voice, “as the heart of man must sooner or later give up the mysteries which lie in its most secret depths!”

“But if those mysteries,” replied Gustavus, seized with curiosity to draw the misanthrope into conversation, “consist of misfortunes *only*, and be not associated with crimes, the heart can be sensible of no more pain in surrendering them up, than the corpse when thrown upon the land occasions to that deep and silent sea.”

“True!” said Mr. Hargrave: and fixing his eyes with penetrating scrutiny upon Gustavus, he added, “Your words were cunningly arranged, young man, to fathom the secrets of my heart. Ah! there is a blush upon your cheeks. You sought to learn whether, if the mysteries of this heart of mine were given up, they would speak of misfortune only, or of crime? But fear not: I am not angry. Perhaps if I were a criminal, my cheeks would have burnt with even a ruddier glow than your own—but they did not. However, let that pass. You unfortunate stranger”—and he pointed towards the corpse—“whose remains you have dragged forth from the bosom of the ocean—”

“He is no stranger to me,” interrupted Gustavus.

“I know him—his name was Elverstone—he was shipwrecked at the same time with myself, precisely eight days back.”

“Ah! then you know him by his apparel?” said Mr. Hargrave: “for if the mother that bore him were to come hither at this moment, she could not recognise in that loathsomely disfigured countenance the face of her own offspring.”

“Yes,” rejoined Barrington: “it was by his raiment that I first had an idea who he was: but that idea is confirmed beyond the possibility of doubt by these leathern bags in which the wretched man secured his gold.”

“Tell me that tale of your shipwreck,” said Mr. Hargrave, surveying Gustavus with interest and attention.

We have already said that the youth was well pleased to enter into conversation with a man whose habits had hitherto been so completely taciturn since his arrival in the neighbourhood of Kingston; and Gustavus accordingly began to tell the history of his shipwreck. He however sought to speak as modestly as possible of himself in reference to the old miser Elverstone: but he soon found that Mr. Hargrave was as keen in penetrating the truth and as pertinacious in questioning him as Mr. Pinnock had been on the first evening of his introduction to that merchant. Thus after a little while Mr. Hargrave wormed out of Gustavus every particular in respect to the youth’s generous conduct towards Elverstone; and it was with increasing attention and interest that the misanthrope surveyed the young sailor.

“You are one,” he said, “who are seeking your fortune in a career of danger and vicissitudes. If the deceased miser Elverstone have relations—”

“I happen to know,” interrupted Gustavus, not foreseeing what was to be the drift of Mr. Hargrave’s speech, “that he had neither kith nor kindred on the face of the earth. We often conversed together on board the ill-fated Catharino Millard: I believe that I was the only person to whom he took any liking or with whom he would discourse in the least degree freely; and he has often told me that he stood alone in the world—an isolated being, having outlived all his kindred and having no soul with whom he could claim relationship, or by whom relationship unto himself could be claimed.”

“Then, in that case,” said Mr. Hargrave, “take you possession of the gold which the miser had hoarded up. It is your’s for many reasons. Your’s because you were the last with whom he spoke on earth—your’s because you sought to save his life, with a thousand perils to your own—your’s because he promised to reward you if you should succeed in saving him—and your’s because you have just dragged his corpse ashore from the sea which has given it up.”

“Yet none of all these reasons,” replied Gustavus, “appear to me sufficiently valid to establish me in the possession of that treasure. I would not touch one particle of that gold unless rightfully entitled to it:—and rightfully entitled I neither am nor ever shall be.”

Mr. Hargrave contemplated Barrington long and steadfastly; and at length he said, “What! is it possible that I meet a human being who will not readily stretch forth his hand to clutch gold whensoever it is offered to his grasp? But come!

you imagine perhaps that I might prove an inconvenient witness of the fact—and you would no longer hesitate to self-appropriate a part if I were to suggest that we share the treasure between us?"

"So far from my being prepared to agree to any such arrangement," replied Gustavus, with some degree of indignation in his look and tone, "I will not permit any one to lay a hand upon that treasure until the proper authorities be upon the spot to take possession. I know not to whom it may rightfully belong: but in England I know that there are Lords of the Manor who have privileges in such cases—and it may be the same here: or perhaps the gold should by virtue of the law pass into the public treasury of the island—or be devoted to some special charity. In any case I am resolved——"

"Enough, young man! enough!" exclaimed Mr. Hargrave: "you shall have your own will. You could not for an instant imagine that I—a sort of outcast—a being more isolated than that miser could possibly have been at the time he spoke to you of his isolation,—you cannot conceive that I could crave any portion of that treasure? I have no taste for gold; because gold is only valuable so far as it can enhance the enjoyments of life—and I have lost all taste for life itself. Not to me, then, does whatsoever amount of gold those leathern bags may contain, appear in any other light than the earth itself upon which the corpse reposes. But you, young man, in the very bloom of existence—well-favoured and high-spirited—with the loftiest aspirations, yet deficient in the means of attaining their object—generous of heart, yet lacking the power to display all your noble generosity,—that you should reject that treasure is to me most marvellous! Why, what have not human beings done for gold? The honour of the proudest men has been purchased by it!—the virtue of the most beautiful women has sold itself for that same precious metal! Justice, though blind-folded, has nevertheless been so dazzled by its luminous rays penetrating through her bandage, that she has taken the glittering ore and tossed it into her balance, so that the wrong side has weighed down and the side of right has gone up! Yes—every crime knows upon this earth has been perpetrated for gold! And yet you recoil even from that which may in the slightest degree savour of a fault, when it is proposed that by so doing you may suddenly become rich!"

"Yes—I recoil," responded Gustavus: "and not for worlds would I self-appropriate that treasure!"

"Excellent young man!" exclaimed Mr. Hargrave: "rest assured that though you are thus acting from the purest and most disinterested motives, your conduct will nevertheless meet its reward. Remain you here with the corpse:—you who are armed with the defences of the noblest qualities, can best protect the dead from the rifling hand of any intending plunderer."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Hargrave hurried away from the spot; and he was speedily lost to the view of Gustavus Barrington. The youth conjectured from the misanthrope's words, as well as from the abrupt manner in which he had taken himself off, that he purposed to fetch assistance to

remove the corpse to some suitable place for its reception; and he therefore resolved to fulfil the instructions he had received by tarrying to keep guard over it. He sat down at a little distance, with his eyes however averted from the loathsome spectacle; and thus upwards of an hour passed. At the expiration of that interval he beheld some persons advancing towards the spot; and he soon perceived that these were four of the negroes belonging to Mr. Pinnock's estate. They carried amongst them a species of bier, on which lay a large cloth wherewith to cover the dead. The corpse was placed upon the bier; and the negroes bent their way towards Mount Pleasant,—Gustavus following. But he saw nothing more of Mr. Hargrave.

The negroes deposited the corpse in a hut about a quarter of a mile distant from Mr. Pinnock's residence; and having locked the door, they gave Gustavus the key,—one of them stating that they had thereby followed out the instructions which Mr. Hargrave had given them. The youth took the key and proceeded homeward. He found that Emily had returned about an hour back; and she was already acquainted with the finding of the body of the deceased miser Elverstone; for Mr. Hargrave had been thither to request that assistance might be sent down to the sea-shore for its removal to some safe convenient place until an inquest could be holden upon it. Miss Pinnock had likewise been informed that the dead body had a considerable quantity of gold about it: but she did not breathe a syllable to the effect that she was also acquainted with the manner in which Gustavus had refused to self-appropriate that gold—although there was something in her looks which made the youth suspect that Mr. Hargrave had not remained altogether silent upon the subject.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Pinnock arrived at the house; and on entering the apartment where Emily and Gustavus were seated, he exclaimed, "You need not tell me a single syllable of anything that has happened! I know it all! That extraordinary fellow Hargrave came to me at the counting-house; and for half-an-hour he indemnified himself in the shape of talk for whole years of taciturnity. Why, what do you think, Emily? This noble-minded young guest-of-our's refused to enrich himself when by stretching out his hand he could have done so, and when he was actually enjoined to do so by one who advanced a thousand reasons to persuade him that he would be justified in doing it?"

"I know it, uncle," answered Emily, in a quiet tone; and yet there was a slightly perceptible vibration of tremulousness in her accents.

"Ah, you know it?" ejaculated Mr. Pinnock. "Then I suppose Hargrave was as communicative to you as he was to me? He told me that he had been here, and that he had seen you. His tongue appears to be completely unlocked, and that it only required such unlocking in order to rattle away at a fine rate and make amends for a past eternity of silence. But since you know everything, Emily, you have of course been expressing to Mr. Barrington all that was flattering and complimentary in respect to his noble conduct?"

"I have said nothing flattering or complimentary to Mr. Barrington, uncle," returned

Emily, in the same quiet tone as before, and also with the same tremulous vibration of the accents.

"What!" cried Mr. Pinnoek, "you have not told him how every good and honest person must admire this conduct on his part?"

"I said nothing of all this," rejoined Emily; "because the satisfaction experienced by a heart conscious of its own integrity, is a far higher reward for a good deed than any praise which human lips may bestow."

It was in a lower voice than before that Emily Pinnoek thus spoke; and as the last words flowed forth from her lips, her large dark eyes flung a look upon Gustavus,—a look which was full of the warmest and loftiest admiration for that conduct which she had been eulogizing in a manner at once so lady-like and so delicate. And the heart of Gustavus felt the influence of that look: it swelled with rapturous emotions—it seemed to him as if he felt a more affectionate sentiment of friendship towards Emily Pinnoek than he had ever previously experienced, strong as that sentiment had already been. He felt too that if they had been alone he could have strained her in his arms, or have fallen at her feet to press her hand to his lips and thank her for having deemed his conduct worthy of so much kind, delicate, and generous consideration on her part.

"That Hargrave," exclaimed Mr. Pinnoek, "is a very extraordinary man—and a very good man too, or else I am exceedingly mistaken! He is resolved—But no matter! I am not going to tell secrets—and now therefore let us sit down to dinner."

Throughout the remainder of that evening Gustavus Barrington could not help thinking that there was a difference in Emily's manner towards him—but a difference of a pleasing and enrapturing character. She displayed not merely the ingenuous candour and open-heartedness of friendship: but there was something softer still—something that seemed to burden almost upon tender interest, without however amounting to any actual manifestation of love. It was as if she felt herself drawn closer to him by circumstances,—as if there were a sympathy attracting heart to heart,—as if many barriers which on account of the briefness of their acquaintance had previously existed between them, had been suddenly hurled down,—as if, in short, they had known each other for a very long period and a corresponding degree of confiding intimacy was the result.

On the following day there was an inquest upon the body; and Gustavus was summoned as the principal witness. He identified the corpse; and being questioned by the Coroner, gave some details in reference to the shipwreck. Mr. Hargrave was likewise summoned: but he simply deposed to the fact of having seen Gustavus drag the corpse ashore. The proceedings quickly terminated; and a suitable verdict was returned. Gustavus looked about for Mr. Hargrave when he issued from the hut where the ceremony took place: but the misanthrope was nowhere to be seen. The youth accordingly repaired to Mount Pleasant, to accompany Emily for a walk; and he still found that the beautiful quadron displayed towards him a manner which savoured somewhat of the artless familiarity and confiding frankness

of a sister—though it differed in this respect, that there was a certain subdued tenderness about it. He felt happy—elate—enraptured with joy—though all the while believing, or at least endeavouring to persuade himself, that in the feelings which he experienced towards Emily Pinnoek there was nothing which in any way impaired or interfered with the affectionate regard he had been wont to entertain for his cousin Winifred.

On returning to the house after their ramble, Emily and Gustavus were surprised to find that Mr. Pinnoek was at home, it being a full hour earlier than that at which he was wont to make his afternoon appearance at Mount Pleasant.

"There!" he at once exclaimed, starting up from his seat—with one hand clapping Gustavus upon the shoulder—and with the other pointing towards the table in the drawing-room where this scene took place: "those are for you!"

Gustavus and Emily both glanced at the table, upon which they beheld a small box of common wood, and a letter of a long official shape, bearing a very large seal. This document was addressed to "Gustavus Barrington, Esq.," and the youth proceeded to open it. It was a letter from the Governor of Jamaica, couched in terms the most flattering to Gustavus. It set forth that having heard from Mr. Hargrave how Mr. Barrington had refused to possess himself of the gold found about the person of the deceased Mr. Elverstone—and that having likewise heard from Mr. Pinnoek how Mr. Barrington had behaved in the kindest and most generous manner towards Mr. Elverstone during the awful perils of the storm and shipwreck—the Governor of Jamaica had awarded to Mr. Barrington the amount of golden treasure that had been found upon the person of the deceased.

Scarcely had Gustavus read this document, when Mr. Pinnoek snatched it from his hand; and giving it to Emily, he cried, "Read this—and see how highly it tells on behalf of our young friend!"

Miss Pinnoek took the letter: but as she read it, she partially averted her countenance, so that her features were veiled by the long massive tresses of her black hair from the view of Mr. Pinnoek and Gustavus. The merchant began to open the box containing the gold which had been sent from the governor's house—while Gustavus, thinking at the moment nought of the precious metal, had his eyes fixed upon Emily Pinnoek. She slowly looked round:—there was a glowing admiration in her regards,—a flush of enthusiastic joy upon her cheeks,—all bespeaking the nature and the strength of the emotions that were swelling in her bosom. But deeper grew that blush as she suddenly perceived that the eyes of Gustavus were fixed upon her; and her own eyes were instantaneously withdrawn—but not before those luminous orbs had poured upon Gustavus a flood of light, brilliant yet tender—shining yet full of softness—and which seemed to envelope his entire soul in its halo. Then he again felt as if he could seize her in his arms and strain her to his breast: he felt as if he longed to press to his heart that form which seemed glowing with emotions excited on his account,—to drink in the sweets of her lips and to look down into the depths of her superb dark eyes.

Dinner was shortly afterwards served up; and Mr. Pincock explained how the incident with respect to the Governor of Jamaica had been brought about.

"I told you yesterday," he said, "that Hargrave came to my counting-house and discoursed at a rate as if he were determined to show that he really possessed a tongue and could use it. He was enthusiastic in his eulogies of your conduct, Gustavus. He said that he had seen so much wickedness in the world that to meet with an honest and upright heart was like being lifted from pandemonium into paradise. He vowed that you should be recompensed for your generosity towards Elverstone and your integrity in refusing to possess yourself of the miser's gold. I was very well disposed to aid him; and away we went to the Governor. The result of our proceedings is now known to you—and I am happy in being enabled to congratulate you on the possession of a fortune of at least fourteen or fifteen thousand pounds."

The heart of Gustavus leapt with joy on hearing how rich he had suddenly become; for so ignorant was he of the value of the precious metal, that his ideas had not extended beyond a tenth part of the sum which Mr. Pincock had just named. To that worthy merchant he expressed his gratitude for the kind intervention he had adopted on his behalf, in company with Mr. Hargrave; and he resolved to seek the earliest opportunity of conveying a similar tribute of his thanks to the misanthrope himself.

When he retired to rest that evening, Gustavus began to deliberate what course he should now pursue. Nearly two years had elapsed since he left his cousin Winnie in a state of comparative poverty, and his grandfather still the inmate of a prison. He had now the means of surrounding them both with every comfort—perhaps indeed of effecting the liberation of his grandfather; for Gustavus was as ignorant as Winifred herself of the extent and nature of the old man's liabilities—and in the mingled enthusiasm and inexperience of youth he thought that fourteen or fifteen thousand pounds constituted a sum that could accomplish almost anything.

"It was but a week ago," he said within himself, "that I wrote to Winifred to tell her how I had just escaped from the awful perils of shipwreck and had found friends in a strange land. But now it is my duty to take ship with the least possible delay for my native country, and bear to those beloved relatives the gold which Providence has given me."

For an instant there was a feeling of unspeakable joy in the young man's heart—a gush of emotions which made that heart swell, his lips quiver, and the tears come into his eyes: but the next instant he found himself heaving a profound sigh—for the image of the beautiful quadron seemed to rise up before him, and he was smitten with the feeling that it would be hard indeed to part from one with whom he had formed so affectionate a friendship. Ah! he looked upon it as *friendship*!—but *when* was friendship so tender? and when has it ever so completely taken upon itself the semblance of love?

The youth lay awake for some time, reflecting upon the course which he ought to pursue; and

feeling that duty was paramount, he resolved upon performing that duty at every sacrifice of his own sentiments and of his own inclinations in respect to Emily Pincock.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LOVE.

At breakfast-time on the following morning Mr. Pincock proposed to convert Gustavus Barrington's ore into its value in sterling money, offering to undertake the task, and giving the youth the assurance that he would make the best bargain which was possible on his behalf. The merchant however added that two or three days might elapse before he should be enabled to effect this object; and therefore Gustavus said nothing at that moment of his intention to leave Jamaica with the least possible delay. Two or three days more or less would make no very great difference—besides, he must have a little time for his preparations for the voyage—and then too, Emily Pincock looked so exceedingly handsome and was in such good spirits that he could not possibly find it in his heart to say a syllable that might distress her; for he flattered himself that on account of the *friendship* which subsisted between them, she would be as much grieved as he himself was at the idea of separation.

Mr. Pincock went off into Kingston, taking the box of gold with him: Gustavus and Emily sallied forth for their usual ramble. The youth expressed a desire to see Mr. Hargrave, in order that he might assure that gentleman of the gratitude he experienced for his generous conduct towards him; so that the young couple walked in the direction of the cottage where the misanthrope dwelt. Hitherto Gustavus had never spoken of his family affairs to Miss Pincock: he had never even so much as mentioned his cousin Winifred nor his grandfather: but now he was led on to do so by the course which the conversation took. For Emily Pincock, while repeating her congratulations on his good fortune, ingeniously observed, "You will now at least be independent of a seafaring life, Mr. Barrington; and you need not again risk those ocean-perils which I am sure no one would court unless actually compelled by circumstances."

This speech—so artlessly made, and arising from the purest and most ingenuous feelings—startled Gustavus somewhat, and made him suddenly ask himself, "Can she possibly believe that I intend to settle in Jamaica altogether, or establish myself for the rest of my life at Mount Pleasant?"

Yet there was a feeling within him as if it would not be very disagreeable to be forced to adopt these alternatives: but on the other hand the sense of duty was still uppermost: he was resolved to return to England without delay—and it struck him that he ought to communicate this intention to his companion.

"You speak, Miss Pincock," he said, "as if there were no necessity for me again to go forth upon the great ocean. But whether as an officer or as a mere passenger on board some ship, I shall

shortly have to dare the same perils which all alike who embark on that element have to encounter. I have relations in England,—an aged grandsire, who has experienced much misfortune—a cousin whom I left in comparative poverty—”

“And you are doubtless anxious to rejoin them?” said Emily, in a low voice, and with her looks bent downward, as she walked by the side of Gustavus.

“Oh! is it not my bounden duty?” he exclaimed, in a vehement manner which showed that the sense of duty whereof he spoke was struggling painfully against some strong inclination of an opposite tendency. “Am I not bound to hasten back to those who may perhaps be suffering and whose distresses I may be enabled to alleviate? Yes!—I am sure that with your generosity of heart you would even urge me—”

“Then you seriously think of leaving us?” interrupted Emily: and there was something strange in her tone, as she continued to keep her looks bent downward, while walking by the youth's side.

Gustavus could not immediately give the reply which he felt it would grieve himself to utter, and which he feared it would grieve the beautiful quadron to hear: but after a few moments' reflection, he said in a gentle and subdued voice, “I have experienced so much kind hospitality—so much generous friendship at Mount Pleasant, that it will afflict me infinitely to bid adieu to a place where the shipwrecked stranger has found a home and friends. But I have only one course to pursue—the course dictated by duty—and I must obey the mandate.”

“And no one would attempt to dissuade Mr. Barrington from such a course,” said Miss Pinnock, still in a voice that was low in tone, and strange in its accents—and still with a countenance so bent downward as well as half averted that Gustavus could not catch the slightest glimpse of it.

“I have already told you,” he said, “that I possess an aged grandfather who for years past has been plunged into the deepest afflictions—and then too there is my poor cousin Winifred—”

“Ah! your cousin,” said Miss Pinnock, “is a lady, then?”—and for an instant she glanced towards Gustavus: but her looks were the next moment withdrawn as rapidly. “I thought perhaps he was a young gentleman—like yourself—”

“Oh, no!” cried Gustavus; “Winifred is a girl of about eighteen—as amiable and good a creature—”

“And perhaps beautiful too?” said Miss Pinnock.

“Beautiful?” repeated young Barrington, slowly and deliberately. “Well, I never thought of Winifred's looks. But now that you ask me,” he continued with the most perfect ingenueness, “she is certainly very prepossessing—though I do not know that she could be called beautiful.”

“But she is amiable, and good, and prepossessing,” said Miss Pinnock; “and of course—of course you are very fond of her—you have thought constantly of her during your separation—”

“Oh, constantly!” exclaimed Gustavus; “and

I feel convinced that she has thought incessantly of me. She possesses such an affectionate heart!”

“And—and—you have corresponded—perhaps?” said Miss Pinnock. “You—you—”

Here her voice suddenly seemed to break down, as if it were all in a moment stifled in gaspings. She even appeared to stagger at the instant as she walked.

“Good heavens, Miss Pinnock!” exclaimed Gustavus, “what is the matter?”—and stopping short, he seized her hand.

By that movement he obtained a glimpse of her countenance: the tears were trickling down her cheeks.

“You are weeping, Miss Pinnock!—Oh, you are weeping!” cried Gustavus, who was both bewildered and afflicted. “Emily—Miss Pinnock I mean—pardon my boldness—but for God's sake tell me what I have said or done to give you pain?”

He still retained her hand in his own: she made but one slight effort to withdraw it—and then she seemed to abandon it to him as that effort was ineffectual. Her countenance was bent downward: but still Gustavus could see that she continued to weep—and passionately too—while her bosom was convulsed with sobs,—that weeping and those sobbings being altogether beyond her power of control.

“Emily!” he exclaimed, “for heaven's sake tell me what thus afflicts you? Is it because I must depart? Oh! but if you knew how much the idea afflicts me likewise—how great is the distress which the prospect excites—Oh, Emily! you would not doubt my friendship!”

The quadron girl suddenly withdrew her hand; and wiping her eyes with equal rapidity, she drew herself up to her full height: she seemed all in a moment to put on that dignity which belonged to her disposition; and bending the full power of her superb dark eyes upon Gustavus, she said, “How can you be afflicted to depart, when you love your cousin Winifred—you are doubtless engaged to her—and you will return to England to espouse her?”

Then all in a moment a veil fell from the eyes of Gustavus Barrington: quick as the flash of lightning illumines the recesses of a previously pitch-dark cave, revealing all the features that were unknown before, was the state of the youth's own mind revealed unto himself. He comprehended that he loved the handsome quadron!

“No, Emily!” he exclaimed, “I am not pledged to my cousin Winifred!—no word of love has ever passed between us. It is only as a brother might regard a pure sister that I look upon my cousin. But Oh! if I dared speak—Yes, yes, I will speak! it is you whom I love, Emily!—you only who can constitute my happiness!”

A half-subdued cry of joy, rich and melodious in the fulness of the heart's gushing emotions, escaped from the lips of the superbly handsome quadron; and the next instant she was folded in the arms of Gustavus. She sank upon his breast as if weighed down with the sense of happiness—as if languid and half-fainting beneath the ecstatic power of her own feelings. And Gustavus pressed his lips to her's—and he covered her cheeks and her brow with kisses—and he strained her again

and again to his breast. Those lips gave back the kiss—long, delicious, and voluptuously tender: those cheeks burnt and glowed beneath the other kisses which he imprinted on them; and as her full bosom heaved against his chest, he could feel the wild quick palpitations of her heart.

"Yes, Emily," he murmured. "I love you—and you only!"

A long deep-drawn sigh of pleasure was the only response which the beautiful quadroom could give to this assurance; for her heart was too full of ecstatic emotions to enable her lips to frame a single syllable. For some minutes Gustavus thus retained her in his arms, until he suddenly perceived some object moving amongst the trees at a little distance: and then he relaxed his hold upon her. She at once seemed to be recalled to her own self-possession; and completely disengaging herself from his embrace, she bent upon him a look that was full of the deepest, most impassioned love—while her cheeks were still glowing with blushes, and her bosom was still heaving with the emotions that swelled within it.

He said nothing of having seen any one amongst the trees: he did not choose to alarm or shock her by the intelligence that she had possibly been observed when elapsing in his arms. Indeed, he himself speedily forgot the incident in the enthusiasm with which he renewed the outpourings of his love. They walked on together—she now leaning upon his arm, and drinking in all the fond things to which in his youthful rapture he was giving utterance. At length he exclaimed, as if suddenly seized with perplexity and bewilderment, "But can it be possible that so much happiness is a reality?—or is it all a dream? Tell me, Emily—do you really love me?"

"Yes, I love you, Gustavus," she answered, in the golden melody of her voice: then suddenly raising her countenance, which had hitherto been again cast down, she displayed it, all glowing with the animation of joy, and love, and fondness, to the view of her companion. "Why should I deal in any ridiculous affectations with you, after the avowal which has come from your lips? No—I will not. I will frankly and candidly reveal all I have felt. The very first moment I beheld you, it was not with indifference. I listened to the story of your shipwreck; and I was inspired with an enthusiastic admiration for all that you had done on that awful, that memorable occasion. Days passed on—and I delighted to be your companion. Your lofty and noble behaviour in respect to the dead miser's gold enhanced the admiration I already experienced for your character. But it was not until within the hour that is now passing, that I comprehended the real state of my feelings. When however you spoke of departure and of your cousin—Oh! then—But enough, Gustavus! I love you—yes, I love you—I feel that I could not live without you!"

"And I, dearest Emily," responded the enraptured youth, "could not live without you! Oh, our separation shall not be long!—not one moment longer than I can possibly help!"

"Separation?" ejaculated the quadroom, suddenly flinging a look of wild dismay upon her lover. "You will not leave me, Gustavus!"

"Oh! believe me, Emily," he cried, "it will go to my heart to bid you farewell even for a few

weeks! But I must return to England before I dare hope for the crowning of my happiness. I have duties to perform—sacred and solemn duties—and these must be accomplished, even though instead of a mere sacrifice of feelings it were the sacrifice of life itself!"

"Oh, no!" she wildly and passionately exclaimed, "you must not leave me! Consider the perils of that frightful ocean from which you have once so providentially escaped: it were madness, it were wickedness to dare them again! No, no—it must not be! There is no sacrifice that I would not make for you—nothing you could ask of me that I would not perform!—and I have a right to expect the same at your hands!"

"Good heavens, Emily!" exclaimed Gustavus, infinitely distressed; "would you have me abandon my aged grandsire—my cousin who may be steeped in poverty—"

"No—I would not have you abandon them," interjected Emily: "heaven forbid! But by means of correspondence and of trustworthy persons, you can effect on their behalf all that you deem requisite to do and all that your present wealth enables you to accomplish."

"And incur the risk of being taxed with the blackest ingratitude towards those who love me!" exclaimed the noble-minded youth; "to be accused of having lost all love for the relations who are dear to me, and to whom I know that I also am most dear! O Emily! You would not ask me to do all this? You know that I shall hasten to return to you! My God, Emily! can you doubt it when I declare that you are dearer to me than life itself? But love—even the fondest and the most devoted—has its duties to perform, and must make its sacrifices—and this is now our case!"

The beautiful quadroom gave no response: she reflected profoundly, and also with a deep melancholy. Gustavus watched her countenance with the utmost anxiety: it was a gloriously handsome countenance; and it went to his very soul to be compelled to say or do aught that could inflict pain upon the possessor of such a face,—infinite pain to use language or resolve upon any step that might cause that bosom to swell with any emotions that were not akin to happiness. But the sense of duty was strong in the young man's mind; and he was resolved to perform it. Passionately and devotedly though he loved Emily Pinnock, yet was he determined to do violence to his feelings rather than appear deficient in affection towards the grandsire who had known so many years of suffering, and the cousin whose sweetness of disposition, whose amiability, and whose sisterly love he remembered so well.

"If it be necessary that you should undertake this voyage," said Emily, at length breaking silence, "it is not for me to dissuade you from it. I know that you love me, Gustavus—I judge of your feelings by mine own. I have every faith in your constancy—your fidelity—your honour. I ought rather to admire you for the magnanimity which temporarily sacrifices the heart's feelings to a sense of duty, than seem even for a single instant to upbraid or reproach you. Go then, Gustavus!—and when you return, you will find your own Emily prepared to receive you with the most enthusiastic joy!"

"Oh, now you speak," exclaimed Gustavus, "in a manner that is worthy of you!"—and again he folded her in his arms. "I will presently reveal everything to your uncle—I will speak candidly to him—I will tell him that we love—and I will ask his sanction to the institution of a solemn engagement between us."

Emily—whose feelings again appeared to be steeped in melting rapture and soft subdued delight, as her head reposed upon her lover's breast—assented to the proposition he had just made; and that assent was murmuringly given in the melodious tones of her golden voice. Long they wandered about the plantation: completely engrossed were they by the language, the feelings, and the thoughts of love: and arm-in-arm they returned at last to the house. It was however now only two o'clock in the afternoon—the hottest portion of the day; and there was still a considerable interval to the dinner-hour. Emily had some little household matters to attend to; and Gustavus found himself for awhile alone. He then suddenly recollected that one of the objects for which he had walked forth—or at least in that walk had taken a particular direction along with his companion—was not effected. He had not proceeded to Mr. Hargrave's residence: the image of the misanthrope, as well as everything that concerned him, had completely slipped out of the youth's mind. He felt that he was guilty of ingratitude or of negligence towards the individual who had demonstrated so kind and generous an interest on his behalf, and to whom indeed he was indebted for the fortune which he now possessed. He accordingly resolved to repair the omission with the least possible delay; and he set off for another long walk, again bending his steps in the direction of the misanthrope's cottage.

While upon his way he reflected upon everything that had taken place between Emily Pinnock and himself. He felt how deeply, how intensely, how passionately he loved her; and there was an indescribable luxury of feeling in the knowledge that he was beloved in return. It seemed to him as if he still felt her glowing cheek pressing against his own—that his lips were still fastened to her's—that he was still drinking in the sweets of her fragrant breath—that her large dark eyes were still gazing up at him with the devotedness, the fondness, and the adoration of her soul—and that her bosom, still resting against his breast, enabled him to tell the quick pulsations of her heart. Oh, to possess such a being—to call her his wife—to live for her alone—to know that she lived for him only—to be enabled to gaze upon her with the pride of an admiring husband,—this was a prospect fraught with indescribable happiness for the contemplation of the enthusiastic Gustavus Barrington!

He had proceeded to a considerable distance, and he was in the midst of his delicious reverie, when he suddenly became aware that some one was approaching; and the next moment he recognised Mr. Hargrave. The misanthrope was dressed in precisely the same style as on former occasions when Gustavus had seen him: his apparel, which once had been good, was shabby, almost threadbare; and his whole appearance denoted, if not actual slovenliness, at least a considerable indifference to the niceties of the toilet. His demeanour

was grave and serious: but Gustavus could not help noticing something, which indeed had struck him on the occasion when they met by the side of the drowned miser's corpse—namely, that there was a certain gentility of manner about the misanthrope, which seemed to speak of far better times and of a period when he moved in quite another sphere.

"I was proceeding to your residence, sir," said Gustavus, hastening forward and seizing the misanthrope by the hand, "to convey to you the assurance of my illimitable gratitude for the goodness and the generosity you have displayed towards me."

"Enough, young man!—enough!" said Mr. Hargrave curtly, if not petulantly. "Beet assured that if my only motive had been to be thanked, you would have stood but little chance of any intervention on my part."

"And yet, my dear sir," responded Gustavus, "such conduct as that which you have shown towards me, cannot be repaid by the gratitude of a lifetime!"

"After all," said Mr. Hargrave, in a more courteous tone, "it is as well to possess a grateful heart. Gratitude is a flower that can seldom thrive amidst those evil passions and feelings which are the weeds of the soul. And now what do you purpose to do? Do you mean to tarry in Jamaica? or do you intend to return speedily to your own native land?"

"I propose to leave Jamaica in the course of a few days," answered young Barrington; "and if it be possible that I can do aught for you in any part of the world, no matter how remote—"

"Nothing! nothing!" interrupted Mr. Hargrave. "No one living can do anything to serve me! But listen to me, young man:—and the misanthrope's dark eyes were fixed keenly and piercingly upon Gustavus. "I will not insult you by the supposition that you are capable of rewarding Mr. Pinnock's kind hospitality with so black an ingratitude—No, no! you cannot: for you have already proved to me that you possess a grateful heart—and besides, a young man who has displayed so many noble qualities and lofty attributes as you have done, rises far above all such suspicion."

"Good heavens! what mean you, Mr. Hargrave?" asked Gustavus, perplexed and even frightened by the strange language thus addressed to him.

"You are young," continued the misanthrope: "your age cannot exceed twenty; and youth, even though endowed with the noblest qualities, is apt to be precipitate, thoughtless, and impulsive. The youthful heart obeys its own inclinations without thinking of the consequences: the happiness of the day is sufficient for it, without dreaming of what the morrow may bring forth. Beware, therefore, young man, how you suffer yourself to be hurried along by the sweeping current of a rapidly formed passion!—but still more must you beware how you tutor an innocent and artless girl to love you—you who are, as you assure me, on the eve of your departure from an island to which you may perchance never return!"

Gustavus could no longer doubt the point of Mr. Hargrave's allusion; and now he suddenly recollected something which for hours past he had



forgotten,—that object moving amongst the trees at a distance when he was retaining Emily Pinnoek in his arms. The colour mounted, vivid and glowing, to the youth's cheeks; and he said in a hesitating and faltering tone, "I know what you mean, Mr. Hargrave—you saw something that took place—you were amongst the trees——"

"And what am I to understand," demanded the misanthrope, "by this present confusion on your part? Is it possible that you have whispered guilefully in the ear of the merchant's daughter?"

"Guilefully?" echoed Gustavus. "No, sir! I am incapable of it!"—and he now looked Mr. Hargrave fully and frankly in the face. "I confess that I love Mr. Pinnoek's niece—she loves me in return—she has consented that I shall proceed to England—I have promised to come back so soon as certain affairs shall have been duly

settled—and moreover I intend this very day to speak to Mr. Pinnoek upon the subject."

"Tis well, young man," said the misanthrope: "your intentions are honourable—you will appeal to the young lady's father—and it is sufficient. Mr. Pinnoek loves his daughter—though unacknowledged as such——"

"Ah! what mean you?" ejaculated Gustavus, who had been wondering why the misanthrope spoke of them as father and daughter, when the youth himself looked upon them only as uncle and niece.

"Oh, it is scarcely a secret," ejaculated Mr. Hargrave: "or else perhaps I should be the last man in existence to betray the mystery if it were one worth keeping. But all the neighbourhood knows the real truth; and Mr. Pinnoek himself will most probably reveal it to you when you are presently alone together. He has never been

married—and that is perhaps all the greater reason why he should not be a saint. He has his failings and his weaknesses as well as other men. There was a mulatto woman on his estate; and she became the mother of a child, of whom Mr. Pinnoek was the father. That child has grown up into the Emily whom you know and love. Her mother, as I have heard, died in giving her birth; and Mr. Pinnoek reared the offspring of this amour. But partly from motives of delicacy towards the world—partly because it is no uncommon thing amongst the wealthy planters of this island—and partly, perhaps, to save the feelings of the girl herself by keeping her in ignorance of her real parentage,—he styled her his niece. But whether she be still in ignorance——”

“Oh, yes! I am convinced she is!” exclaimed Gustavus, astonished at all he had heard. “She is herself too candid and confiding to suspect the truth of any tale which may have been told her by one whom she loves, reveres, and looks up to: she is too artless, and innocent to fathom the mysteries——”

“Well,” interrupted Mr. Hargrave, “it is not of the slightest consequence: the girl is what she is, no matter what her parentage may have been. But still I thought it better that you should know the truth at once in respect to Emily Pinnoek.—And now, young man, I have only one more word to say. Let me see you again, if perfectly convenient to yourself, before you leave the island.”

Having thus spoken, Mr. Hargrave turned abruptly away; and Gustavus for some minutes followed him with his eyes, until he disappeared behind some neighbouring trees.

“Singular being that he is!” thought the youth to himself, as he began to retrace his steps homeward. “He manifests the utmost interest in me—his heart has not been altogether spoiled by the calamities which may have seared it as if with the blasting lightning: for *calamities* they must have been which made him what he is!—of *crimes* he must ever have been incapable! And as for the tale that he has told me in reference to the birth of my beloved Emily, ’tis not of the slightest consequence. Legitimate or illegitimate—the daughter or the niece of Mr. Pinnoek—she is still the same beautiful, charming, and adorable object. Oh, I love you, Emily! I love you!”

Gustavus reached Mount Pleasant just at the very moment that Mr. Pinnoek was alighting from his chaise; and the worthy merchant exclaimed, “I have not been able to effect to-day a sale for your gold. But I am promised an excellent bargain for to-morrow. Here! take the box—and lock it up in the cupboard in your chamber. I have brought it home again for security’s sake: I would not leave it at my counting-house—and your own room is the most secure beneath this roof.”

Emily Pinnoek had come forth from the open casement of the drawing-room to welcome the merchant’s return; and Gustavus bent upon her a significant look, as much as to imply that in a very short time he would avow his love and make known his suit to him who after all must be the arbiter of their destinies. He took the box, hastened to his chamber, and secured it in the cupboard. He then proceeded to the drawing-room; and shortly afterwards dinner was announced.

During the meal both Gustavus and Emily were somewhat embarrassed and silent: but Mr. Pinnoek did not perceive that there was anything peculiar in their manner; for though acute enough in business-affairs, he was slow to recognize the indications of love; and moreover when others were silent, he was accustomed to chatter away with a volubility which might make up for any deficiency on the part of his companions’ tongues. Shortly after the dessert was placed upon the table, Emily rose and quitted the room;—and now came the moment at which Gustavus had resolved to open his mind to the merchant.

The youth could not endure suspense; and he therefore speedily entered upon the topic. At first he proceeded fluently enough, while expatiating upon the many merits of Emily Pinnoek; but when he touched upon the avowal and the entreaty to which this preface was to lead, he became confused—he stammered, hesitated, and faltered—he blushed and grew nervous,—and all the more so when he perceived that Mr. Pinnoek was staring at him with the open eyes and open mouth of amazement. For it had never once entered the worthy man’s head that there was any probability of the dashing young sailor falling in love with the quadroon girl his daughter.

“You mean me to understand, then,” at length said Mr. Pinnoek, finding how Gustavus was floundering amidst a mass of verbiage from which he could not disentangle himself—and it was with a half serious, half good-humoured smile that he thus came to the youth’s relief,—“you mean me to understand, then, that my Emily’s black eyes have stolen away your heart? Why, you have not known each other quite ten days yet!”

“I have already assured you, my dear sir,” interjected Gustavus, “that I know Miss Pinnoek as well as if we had been acquainted as many years. I beseech——”

“Have you spoken to the girl herself upon the subject?” asked Mr. Pinnoek.

“I have,” was the reply: “and were it not for the happiness of having experienced a favourable answer, I should not now be appealing for your assent.”

“The deuce! This grows more and more serious,” ejaculated the merchant, sending forth a long whiff of smoke. “Well, but you are both young—though truly I can have no objection to the formation of an engagement—for you know my opinion of you—you are an honourable young man——”

“Oh, then you have given your assent!” exclaimed the overjoyed Gustavus, seizing the merchant’s hand and pressing it with the most grateful fervour.

“Why, it appears,” said Mr. Pinnoek, smiling, “that you have both anticipated my consent by agreeing on the subject between yourselves. What alternative have you left me except to agree also? But there is one thing of which I must inform you,” he continued, his countenance becoming serious: “and mind, if you think it constitutes any barrier or any prejudice, you shall be free to recall your proposals——”

“I know, sir, to what you allude,” said Gustavus: “and so far from entertaining any prejudice on the subject——”

"Ab! you know it?" cried Mr. Pinnoek. "But Emily herself——"

"Is undoubtedly ignorant on the point," at once added young Barrington. "The tale reached my ears——"

"Oh! I dare say," interrupted the merchant, "it is no very great secret after all! The niggers know it to a man—and doubtless you have been chatting with them—and they are fond of a gossip. But you tell me that you mean to return to England without delay—that you wish to form this engagement, and that you will come back speedily to fulfil it?"

"Such is my intention," answered Gustavus, his heart beating with rapture at having obtained the merchant's assent to his suit for the beautiful Emily's hand.

There was some little more conversation on the subject: but Gustavus did not think it necessary to inform Mr. Pinnoek that he had received the intelligence relative to the quadroon's parentage from Mr. Hargrave. It was a point on which he delicately forbore from expatiating, not only on account of the subject itself, but likewise because he did not wish it to be thought that Mr. Hargrave, whose intentions were evidently most kind and generous towards him, had descended to mere gossip or tittle-tattle.

And now Gustavus was burning with a joyous desire to acquaint Emily with the result of his appeal to Mr. Pinnoek; and as he suddenly caught a glimpse of a white drapery at a little distance in the garden, he started and looked eagerly forth from the casement. The worthy merchant comprehended what was passing in the youth's mind and what thus excited him; and with a gay laugh, he said, "Go, my dear boy—fly to your beloved. I know that you long to be with her; and it would be cruel to detain you."

Forth from the open casement did Gustavus accordingly speed; and in a few moments he was with the quadroon girl. With fervid rapture did he strain her in his arms; and she therefore comprehended that her uncle (as she regarded Mr. Pinnoek) had given an affirmative response. Again she clung to her lover with all that impassioned fondness which she had previously displayed towards him: her beautifully modelled arms—warm, plump, and firm, but with a skin of velvet softness—were thrown about his neck; and the ardour with which his own caresses were bestowed, was equalled by that with which Emily's moist red lips gave them back.

"You are mine, dearest Emily! I am your's!" exclaimed Gustavus: "your uncle has given his consent—the engagement exists between us—and we have confirmed it with our kisses! Oh, a few weeks will soon pass!—and on my return from England I shall conduct you to the altar!"

"Then you are decided upon undertaking this voyage, Gustavus?" said the quadroon, who was now walking slowly by his side; and her large luminous eyes, glancing up at his countenance for a moment, were immediately afterwards bent downward.

"Dearest, dearest Emily! have I not already assured you," asked Gustavus, "that it is a duty paramount above all other considerations?—and have not you yielded your assent that this duty must be accomplished?"

"Yes," she murmuringly replied; "it must be so——and let us speak no more upon the subject."

"Only one single word, dearest Emily!—only one word more upon that topic!" exclaimed the young man. "To-morrow your uncle will convert my ore and gold dust into money; and then will I lose not a moment in taking my departure, so that I may return all the more speedily——"

But at this instant Gustavus stopped short; for some white drapery at a little distance amongst the shrubs of the garden, caught the eyes of himself and Emily,—the latter at once saying, "Hush!"

Although the evening was now far advanced, yet the heavens were beautifully clear; all surrounding objects were distinctly visible; and moderate-sized print might have been read. The white drapery was advancing; and in a few moments its wearer revealed himself in the person of the colossal black who bore the name of Nelson. Again, as on the former occasion when they met this man, did Emily shrink towards her lover and cling to his arm as she took it; and such were the suspicion and mistrust which Gustavus entertained for the hideous negro, that he held himself in readiness to defend his well-beloved against an attack which he could not help thinking the man was quite capable of making. But Nelson only bestowed a respectful salutation on both; and he continued his way towards the villa, bearing in his hand a letter, which was evidently the cause of his presence there on the occasion. Indeed, we may as well observe that it was some friendly communication from Mr. Thurlow, Nelson's master on the neighbouring estate, to Mr. Pinnoek.

"That horrible negro always terrifies you, dearest Emily," said Gustavus, when Nelson had disappeared from their view. "For heaven's sake be careful when I am away from you!—do not wander forth alone in unfrequented places! You promise me this, dear Emily?"

"I promise you, Gustavus," she replied.

They continued to roam together in the garden until beyond the hour when coffee was usually served up; and on returning to the apartment in which Mr. Pinnoek was still seated with his wine and cigars, that gentleman good-naturedly and gaily exclaimed, "On my soul, you will make a handsome couple!"

Gustavus gazed with enthusiastic fondness upon the beautiful quadroon, through the duskiest of whose complexion the warm blood mantled richly, while her looks were bent down in modest confusion at Mr. Pinnoek's remark.

At length, Emily's usual hour for retiring arrived: but Gustavus sat up a little longer with Mr. Pinnoek, who was fond of a gossip with a companion. At last however young Barrington sought his own chamber; and previous to disapparel himself, he emptied his pockets, as was his wont,—depositing their contents upon the drawers, and placing his clothes outside the door to be brushed by the domestics in the morning. Amongst those contents of his pockets was the key of the cupboard in which he had secured the gold: and Gustavus could not help taking a peep at his treasure before he retired to rest; for he thought within himself how much happiness the possession of that wealth would enable him to infuse into the

minds of his aged grandsire and his cousin Winifred, when in a short time he should again be with them in London.

Having re-locked the door of the cupboard and laid the key upon the drawers, Gustavus sought his couch. The bliss which filled his soul kept him for some while awake: but at length slumber stole upon his eyes—and then in a short time he slept profoundly. When he awoke in the morning, it occurred to him that there was a certain grateful freshness in the atmosphere of his chamber which was not usual until he opened the window, as he was in the habit of doing every morning the instant he stepped out of bed. But as he now descended from his couch, he perceived that the window was open; and yet he felt perfectly confident that it was closed ere he sought his bed on the previous night. It was a casement-window, opening inward like a pair of folding-doors; and it struck him that the fastening having been negligently secured, must have given way during the night. Attaching no further importance to the circumstance, Gustavus proceeded to perform his ablutions and his toilet with all possible haste; for he had caught a glimpse of Emily's white drapery in the garden, and he was in a hurry to join her. In a quarter of an hour he was descending the stairs; and then in a few moments he was by her side. Ferid was the embrace in which he strained her; and the beautiful quadroon girl seemed to cling to him more lovingly, if possible, than ever. They walked for a little while until the breakfast, which they were accustomed to take alone together, was announced to be in readiness: and then they entered the villa. It was not until they had finished that Mr. Pinnoek made his appearance; and as he was always late in the morning, his repast was quickly partaken of. The chaise drove round to the door; and the merchant, rising from the table, exclaimed with a smile, as he addressed himself to Gustavus, but glanced towards Emily, "I suppose it is of no use, my young friend, to ask you to accompany me? You are better engaged."

"Yes—with your permission," replied Gustavus, blushing with youthful confusion. "I would rather remain at Mount Pleasant."

"Well, then, farewell to both of you till dinner-time!" cried Mr. Pinnoek; and he was speeding forth through the open casement to enter his chaise, when suddenly recollecting something, he exclaimed, "Ah! I had well-nigh forgotten the box of gold!"

"And I had totally forgotten it!" cried Gustavus, with a smile. "I will fetch it this instant."

He hastened out of the room—rushed up the stairs—and burst precipitately into his own chamber; for he knew that Mr. Pinnoek was in a hurry and must not be kept waiting. In a moment the key was taken from his pocket: the next moment it turned in the lock; and the door of the cupboard was opened. But Gustavus started, while a cry of affright and amazement burst from his lips: for the box of gold was gone! He passed his hand before his eyes: he fancied that a mist must be obscuring his vision. He looked again: but no!—there was nothing upon the shelf!—it was empty! and so was every other shelf in that eupboard: for the youth had used it only for the

one occasion of placing the box therein:—his own effects were all deposited in the chest of drawers.

With another cry—wilder and more penetrating than the former one—Gustavus rushed down the stairs, fevered in brain and frantic in looks.

"Good God! what has happened?" exclaimed Mr. Pinnoek, the instant the youth burst into the parlour.

"Oh! what is the matter?" asked Emily, bounding towards him with affright depicted on her beautiful features.

"The box has disappeared!" gasped forth Gustavus: "the gold is gone!"

A cry burst from the lips of the quadroon; and an ejaculation of astonishment from those of Mr. Pinnoek.

"Ah, I recollect!" suddenly exclaimed Gustavus, who was terribly excited. "That window which I found open! Oh!—and that villainous-looking negro! Yes, yes!—it is all too clear! He must have heard me speak of the gold last evening! I see it all! Nelson is the robber!"

"Yes—Nelson must be the thief!" hastily ejaculated Emily: and then bursting into a flood of tears, she exclaimed, "Oh, my poor Gustavus!"

"But this must be at once investigated!" cried Mr. Pinnoek, almost as much excited as the two lovers themselves: "it is most serious! it is most abominable! Come—let us see!"

Thus speaking, he rushed from the room, and sprang up the staircase towards the youth's chamber,—Gustavus himself and the beautiful quadroon girl closely following. The cupboard-door stood wide open, as Barrington had just left it; and all the shelves were empty.

"Why, what is this?" suddenly exclaimed Emily: "a pane of glass has been cut out!"

Mr. Pinnoek and Gustavus turned abruptly towards the open casement; and there, sure enough, they beheld the cause of the quadroon's ejaculation. The pane of glass which was nearest to the handle of the contrivance for fastening the window, had been abstracted; and Gustavus exclaimed with passionate vehemence, "Yes—it is but too evident! The burglar entered my chamber by the window!—he must have stolen in while I slept! None other than the villainous negro could have done it!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

FLORIBEL'S NEW HOME.

THIS scene once more changes: the attention of the reader must be brought back, across the wide Atlantic, to the British metropolis.

It was the end of October—ten days after the disappearance of Floribel from Sidney Villa; and we are about to peep into a splendidly furnished drawing-room at a house in May Fair. The house itself was not large—but it was commodious, and well-appointed in every respect. The apartment to which we are introducing the reader showed that no expense had been spared in fitting it up in the most sumptuous style; and it might be taken as a specimen of the manner in which all the other

rooms in the habitation were furnished. The draperies were of the most costly description: the carpet was so thick that the delicate foot of a female treading thereon would be completely concealed in the pile. On the mantelpiece there was a splendid clock of or-molu, consisting of a group of figures retaining the dial between them,—the whole covered with an immense glass shade. The paper of the walls was of scarlet and gold; and the hangings were to match. Massive marble pedestals, elaborately sculptured, sustained vases of alabaster, filled with flowers from Covent Garden Market.

Upon a lounge, or demi-sofa, Floribel was half-reclining. It was about one in the afternoon; and she was still in her morning *negligée*. Her raven black hair floated in massive tresses upon her shoulders and down her back: the French muslin wrapper afforded something more than a glimpse of the beautiful bosom over which it was but lightly fastened. It defined all the expanding richness of a form which still preserving a youthful symmetry, nevertheless promised to be of voluptuous luxuriance;—and that glowing richness which we have previously described as characterizing the whole person of Floribel, was now more marked and impressive to the sense than when we first beheld her at Sidney Villa. One delicately-shaped foot, thrust into a light slipper, peeped forth beneath the skirt of her drapery as she thus half-reclined upon the sofa.

Upon an elegant little table of rosewood most elaborately carved, stood a casket of jewels, which a neatly dressed, handsome, and genteel-looking lady's-maid, who was standing by, had but very recently brought in; and that it was a new gift was likewise evident from the fact that Floribel was attentively scrutinising each costly article that the casket contained. In the midst of her occupation, a parlour-maid—youthful, genteel, pretty, and well-dressed, as was the other female dependant—entered the room, bearing a massive silver salver containing decanters of wine, and a silver filagree basket filled with cakes. In a word, there was every evidence to denote that Floribel was surrounded by all the luxuries and comforts that money could purchase,—magnificent furniture and costly jewels, delicacies for the table, and servants to anticipate her slightest wish.

But the Hon. Theodore Clifford was not there. And was Floribel completely happy?—was perfect felicity at the bottom of that almost childish delight with which she first contemplated jewel after jewel and gem after gem—or of that coquettish look with which she placed a wreath of pearls upon the raven darkness of her hair, and flung her regards upon her maid as if to inquire how the ornaments became her? The maid was of course in rapture—subdued only by the respect which she observed towards her mistress—at the costly objects which one after another Floribel drew forth from the casket; and the young lady's vanity was infinitely flattered by the well-turned compliments which her abigail continued to pay her. And with her pride thus flattered by the means of embellishing that really magnificent beauty of which she was so fully conscious, and of which she might be pardoned for being proud, was Floribel happy? If she were, why was it that every now and then the lips which smiled as the eyes dwelt upon the con-

tents of the casket, were for a moment compressed as if to keep down a sigh? Why was it that ever and anon a shade of pensiveness came over the young lady's features, and abstraction succeeded to the delight with which she gazed upon jewels and gems,—an abstraction which showed that her thoughts were silently wandering elsewhere. Until she suddenly awoke as it were from her reverie with a start, and spoke in a gay voice as if to convince her domestics that gaiety was the sole and unquestioned occupant of her heart!

"Put down the tray upon another table, Alice," said Floribel, thus addressing the parlour-maid; then again turning to the lady's-maid, she asked, "Are not these things beautiful, Catharine?"

"Beautiful, ma'am!" responded the abigail. "And everything chosen with such taste! everything so well suited to your particular style of beauty!"

"You flatter me, Catharine!" said Floribel, seeming to smile deprecatingly, but in reality well pleased at the incense of adulation which was offered up to her.

"I only meant to speak the truth, ma'am," replied the lady's-maid. "I hope I do not give offence by remarking that Mr. Clifford displays the most excellent taste?"

"Oh, no! praise my husband as much as you like!" cried Floribel: "it is very different from praising me!"

"Pardon me for adding, ma'am," said Catharine, "that Mr. Clifford's taste displays itself in everything—not merely in the selection of gems, but in the choice of her who is best fitted to wear them."

"What! another compliment?" cried Floribel, laughing in a manner which displayed the two rows of her brilliant teeth, pure and without blemish as stainless ivory. "You are really incorrigible! But yet in everything you say in respect to Mr. Clifford's tastes, you are perfectly right: it is really exquisite! and the promptitude with which he does everything is not less remarkable! This house taken, as one may say, all in an hour, and fitted up from floor to roof in three short days!—it is as if he worked miracles with Aladdin's lamp!"

"There are certain inspirations," said Catharine, "which always make a man act as if he were exercising magical powers;—and this is the inspiration of love," she added timidly, as if she feared that she might seem too bold in her discourse.

"Yes, love!" said Floribel, slowly throwing herself back against the cushions of the sofa, and appearing to concentrate all her feelings in the luxurious sense of love. "That sentiment, as you have justly observed, Catharine, works marvels. What has not man achieved for the object of his love?—and what likewise has he not sacrificed? To love may be attributed many of the proofs of most gigantic strength, as well as many of the evidences of the most pitiable weakness, associated with the name of man!"

"All this is true, ma'am," said Catharine, though for an instant she looked somewhat bewildered at the high-flown strain in which her mistress was speaking. "If I should not be thought too bold, I should venture to remark that you, ma'am, ought to be completely happy; for the Hon. Mr. Clifford appears determined that you shall want for nothing."

"Oh, yes! I am completely happy," exclaimed Floribel: but yet it was with a species of effort, though scarcely perceptible, that she gave vent to the ejaculation. "How could I be otherwise? My husband, as you say, surrounds me with all I wish; and my least wants are anticipated."

"And then, too," added Catharine, "Mr. Clifford belongs to one of the noblest families. Of course, ma'am, you will soon be introduced——"

"Oh, yea, yea!" exclaimed Floribel, snatching up one of the jewels and regarding it with every appearance of the most earnest attention. "Of course, as the marriage took place clandestinely, Mr. Clifford has to prepare the way with his family; but in a short time, no doubt——Ah, what a beautiful ruby, Catharine! And what pearls! Look, Alice! You need not be afraid to approach;" for the parlour-maid was standing at a respectful distance, and yet straining her eyes to catch a glimpse of the costly contents of the casket.

"Thank you, ma'am!" she exclaimed, hastening forward to gratify her curiosity. "Oh, what beautiful things! How——"

And she stopped suddenly short. Floribel looked at her, and asked with a half-smile, as if she penetrated her thoughts, "What were you going to say? Speak fearlessly."

"I was going to say, ma'am," replied Alice bashfully, and with more real sincerity than the more worldly-minded and experienced Catharine had been inspired with in her flatteries,—"I was going to say, ma'am, how dearly Mr. Clifford must love you to give you such beautiful things!"

"Yes—to be sure! he adores me! I know he does!" said Floribel. "There is every proof of it! It is true he cannot be always here, because until he breaks the marriage to his father Lord Windermere——"

At this moment the door opened; and a middle-aged, sedate, respectable-looking man—somewhat florid of countenance, and inclined to corpulence—dressed in a suit of black, with a white neck-cloth, and laces of snowy purity—entered the room. This individual filled the united posts of steward and butler. He bowed respectfully, and said, "If you please, ma'am, I have just completed the arrangement of the cellars. The champagne and hock which came last evening, have all been stowed away. Here is a list, ma'am, of the wines, which my master ordered me to give you; and here is the wine-merchant's list, that in case you should choose to make any addition to the stock——"

"No, Bateman," said Floribel. "I think in all conscience there is sufficient according to your own list! Eighty dozen of wine!—and I who scarcely ever touch it!"

"Permit me to observe, ma'am," said Bateman, with another bow, "that when you begin to give balls and parties, the wine soon goes; and as there is still plenty of room in the cellar——"

"Really, Bateman," interrupted Floribel, with an air of languid fatigue, "you had better speak to your master on the subject. He knows more about it than I."

"My master's instructions are, ma'am," rejoined the steward, "that I should take my orders from you in all things."

"Ah, well!" said Floribel, "it is very kind and

very considerate! What were you going to tell me?"

"That there is still plenty of room in the cellar, ma'am," responded Bateman; "and if you will condescend to glance at the wine-merchant's list, you will see, ma'am, that I have made pencil marks against a few sorts that with all due deference you ought, ma'am, to have. I would suggest, for instance, twelve dozen of sparkling Moselle; 'tis lighter than Champagne, and more fitted for supper-parties. Then there is Chablis—excellent with oysters. Six dozen I have marked——"

"I see," said Floribel: "and there are half-a-dozen others. Well, you had better order them; and then the cellar will be complete.—There is nothing like having one's arrangements effective at the outset," added Floribel, thus addressing herself to Catharine as Bateman bowed and quitted the room.

"Every incident proves, ma'am," responded the lady's-maid, "how determined Mr. Clifford is that you shall want for nothing, and that when you begin to receive company your table shall be the envy of all your guests."

"True!" said Floribel. "A husband's love displays itself in these attentions to the material elements of comfort and happiness. Oh, yea! he loves me very much!"

But here again we pause to ask whether Floribel was altogether happy? Perhaps Catharine—who was a very keen observer—might have fancied that her mistress strained and strove somewhat to persuade herself that she veritably enjoyed a happiness without a drawback,—or at least to reason herself into the belief that she ought to experience it, though there might be a lurking sense in her mind that some element to render that happiness complete was wanting. Had Floribel been more a woman of the world, she would not have talked so much to her maid of her husband's love: she would not in the presence of witnesses have endeavoured to find so many proofs of it in all the circumstances by which she was surrounded;—much less would she have striven to elicit from the lips of others so many assurances to corroborate the very thing of which she was endeavouring to persuade herself.

Again the door opened; and a groom in a very handsome livery made his appearance.

"You have taken the note, George?" said Floribel, as the colour went and came in rapid transitions upon her countenance.

"Yes, ma'am," was the reply. "I took a cab, according to your orders; and I was not long in reaching Sidney Villa."

"And whom did you see?" inquired Floribel quickly, at the same time vainly endeavouring to conceal the tremulousness which pervaded her entire form.

"First of all, ma'am," replied the groom, "I saw a female—the housekeeper I should suppose——"

"Ah! Rachel doubtless?" ejaculated Floribel, her heart fluttering more and more.

"Yea, ma'am—that was the name: I heard Miss Evelyn call her by it."

"Ah! then you saw my cousin? you saw Miss Evelyn?" said Floribel eagerly.

"The young lady came out directly the house-

keeper went in to say that Mrs. Clifford's servant had arrived."

"Then you gave her the note?"

"Yes—I gave Miss Evelyn the note, ma'am."

"And what then? Tell me what followed?" cried Floribel with much emotion: "tell me everything!"

"Why, ma'am, then"—and the groom hesitated.

"Speak, speak!" exclaimed Floribel. "What happened, I ask? I command you to tell me!"

"Why, ma'am, Miss Evelyn burst into tears of joy; and—and—she almost fainted."

"Dear Agnes!" murmured Floribel; and the tears started forth from her own eyes. But instantaneously dashing them away, she said, "And Miss Evelyn read the note?"

"Yes, ma'am," rejoined the groom; "and she said that she should come at once—she should be here almost as soon as I could get back."

"Enough," said Floribel, waving her hand for the livery-servant to withdraw.

"If you please, ma'am," he said, before he retired, "at what hour will you please to have the carriage?—and is it to be the close-carriage or the open *calèche*? It is a beautiful day, ma'am—and quite warm, though the end of October."

"I do not know that I shall go out at all to-day. Perhaps Miss Evelyn may stay to dinner. At all events I have no orders to give at present."

The groom bowed and retired. One of the maid-servants also quitted the room; while the other remained to set a few little things to rights; for in a newly furnished house there are always these sorts of attentions to be paid—especially when an upholsterer, obeying a wholesale order, has had but three days for the completion of all arrangements.

Floribel fell into a profound reverie, until she heard a double knock at the door: then she started, and sat quivering with suspense, the colour again coming and going on her beautiful countenance. In a few moments the door opened, and Agnes rushed into the room.

"Dearest Floribel!" she exclaimed.

"Dearest Agnes!" cried the young lady: and they were clasped in each other's arms.

Long did they thus remain embraced. It seemed as if Agnes could not sufficiently assure herself that Floribel was restored to her—that it was a reality and not a dream; while on the other hand Floribel appeared to experience the fulfilment of a previously existing want to cling to some one on whose love and friendship she could rely. The maid retired from the apartment; and the two cousins sat down together.

"You are pale—and you seem careworn, my sweet Agnes," said Floribel, as they looked at each other, their hands fondly clasped.

"Oh, my dear cousin, I am happy now!" replied Agnes:—"Oh, perfectly happy!" she enthusiastically added, as raising Floribel's hand to her lips, she caught sight of the wedding-ring upon her finger.

"But you have suffered much on my account?" said Floribel, in a low and mournful voice.

"Yes,—Oh, much!" exclaimed Agnes. "I knew you had gone to marry Mr. Clifford—"

"Oh! you knew it?" interjected Floribel quickly. "But how? how?"

"Oh! you were seen to depart from Mrs. Sharidan's house with a young gentleman—the police constable saw you—and then I knew that this young gentleman could be none other than Theodore Clifford whom you already loved. But why did you not write to me, Floribel? A single line—a word even—Oh! you know not the uneasiness you would have spared me!" and the tears trickled from the eyes of Agnes at the thought of all the anxiety she had undergone.

"For heaven's sake do not weep, my sweet cousin!" said Floribel, weeping likewise.

"No! no! I am happy now!" cried our amiable heroine, straining Floribel to her bosom;—"and all the more so," she added, in a softer and gentler tone, "because whatsoever little sciutillation of fear and doubt I might have experienced, has now disappeared—pardon me, dearest Floribel, for saying so!"—and again she glanced at the marriage-ring, but this time significantly.

At the moment a slight flush crossed Floribel's countenance: but so transient was it, that when the next instant Agnes raised her eyes again, she perceived it not.

"Oh! I should have written to you," said Floribel; "but I was determined—no doubt it was a silly vanity on my part—but still such was my feeling—I was determined, I say, to wait until I could receive you in a house of my own. Ah! my dear Agnes, it was natural I should wish to convince you of my happiness, after you had doubtless thought that I had fled from our own home only to encounter disappointment and misery."

"And you are completely happy, Floribel?" said Agnes, gazing earnestly with her beautiful blue eyes into the large dark ones of her cousin.

"Oh, happy!—can you doubt it?" cried Floribel, suddenly starting up from her seat. "Look around at this splendid room? Is it not elegantly furnished? See this casket of jewels! What magnificent diamonds! what pearls! what rubies! Here is a sweet watch—a real Bregkat! and here is another, exquisitely enamelled at the back! Look at this choice of gold chains! and here are rings fitted for the fingers of a queen! Ah! here is the list of the wines in our cellar. Eighty dozen!—and about forty more to be added! But come with me over the house."

"And where is Mr. Clifford? where is Theodore your husband?" inquired Agnes.

"Oh, he is not here at present," responded Floribel. "I must tell you that he has a difficult game to play with his father—with whom he is accordingly compelled to pass several hours each day—"

"How long then have you been in London since your marriage?" asked Agnes.

"Let me see?" said Floribel. "We were married—" and again the slight flush passed transiently over her countenance, but still so slightly and so transiently that Agnes perceived it not,— "we were married on the 21st: we returned to London on the 23rd."

"And this is the 31st!" said Agnes, somewhat reproachfully. "A whole week in London—"

"Ah! but we first of all went to a hotel," continued Floribel, "while Theodore took this house: then there was the furnishing and the hiring of servants—for we keep seven, Agnes!—a lady's maid—a parlour-maid—a housemaid—a steward—"

groom—a coachman—and of course a cook. But all these things, as I was saying, required a little time to arrange; and you will admit there has been no delay?"

"And you have not as yet seen Lord Windermere?" said Agnes.

"No—not yet," replied Floribel quickly. "But that is nothing. Theodore will bring it all about as speedily as possible: there is plenty of time. But come, my dear Agnes, and let us look over the house. I myself am scarcely as yet acquainted with all that it contains. Ah! tell me, dearest Agnes, you have forgiven me for the little cheat I put upon you the evening when I left you?"—and Floribel's lips quivered as she spoke.

"Oh, speak no more of it, my dear cousin!" murmured Agnes. "It is done, and cannot be recalled—even if you had the wish."

"Oh, no! I have not the wish—I am completely happy!" exclaimed Floribel: but there was a slight though scarcely perceptible hysteria in her tone in the very endeavour which she made to force it to too high a pitch of exultation. "I should be in such enthusiastic spirits—Oh! I should indeed! were it not for the necessity of living apart from you, dearest, dearest Agnes!"

"When a young lady marries," replied Agnes seriously, "she must abandon all kith and kin for her husband's sake. It is sufficient for me, dear cousin, to know that you are happy; and if Theodore loves you——"

"Oh! look at all these proofs of his love!" cried Floribel, pointing to the casket of jewels. "But come! I have not yet taken you over the house."

Floribel accordingly began to conduct her cousin throughout the dwelling,—which, as we have before said, was not very extensive, but commodious and elegantly appointed. It was evident that no expense had been spared on the fitting up of the establishment; and Agnes wondered somewhat, for she did not think that the Hon. Mr. Clifford, dependent on his father as he was, could be rich enough for such an outlay. Floribel pointed out every object worthy of notice; and these were many—so many indeed that she herself was almost as much making a first acquaintance with them as her cousin Agnes was. She was continuously adducing the various details of the house's appointments as proofs of Theodore's affectionate consideration for herself,—until at length Agnes began to think it strange that Floribel should thus incessantly harp on the same string. The generous-minded and unsophisticated Miss Evelyn was very slow to entertain suspicion: but she could not now defend herself against a certain uneasy feeling—she scarcely comprehended for what—as Floribel continued to discourse in that strain.

"You see, my dearest cousin, how beautifully the place is fitted up," said Floribel, as they returned to the drawing-room after having duly inspected the house. "Do you not think Theodore must love me very dearly to provide such a sweet abode?"

"He lives with you, Floribel," answered Agnes, "and therefore it is as much for his own comfort and convenience as yours. Besides, a husband generally fits up a house according to his means. At the same time, my dear Floribel," Agnes

hastened to observe—for it suddenly struck her that the matter-of-fact way in which she was speaking might savour of unkindness—though she was indeed only expressing the thoughts which received their impulse from that vague and dim misgiving which had previously arisen in her mind,—“at the same time, dear Floribel, there can be no doubt from all you tell me, that Theodore does indeed love you very sincerely.”

"Oh, yes! he does!" cried Floribel; "and my maids were telling me so just before your arrival."

"Your maids?" said Agnes. "You do not converse lightly with them upon a subject which is invested as it were with a kind of secret sacredness?"

"Oh! but the girls are already much attached to me," exclaimed Floribel. "Look! I will give you another proof of Theodore's love:"—and she hastened to open an elegant writing-desk which stood upon a cheffonier. "See! here are all the bills that he has paid for furniture, plate, carriages, horses, wine, and a quantity of other things. He has given them to me—and he has assured me that everything is mine."

Agnes, obedient to the first impulse of her excellent disposition, was about to pour forth the warmest congratulations on this generosity on Theodore Clifford's part,—when she was suddenly smitten with an idea which sent a sickening sensation to the heart. Yet she scarcely comprehended it; it only seemed to her singular that a husband should bid a wife consider furniture, plate, horses, and carriages, all as her own. She fancied they were things which, constituting as it were common property between a husband and wife, could not be talked about as to whom in particular they should belong. She looked at Floribel; and then she asked in a gentle, hesitating voice, "And where were you married, dearest cousin?"

"Oh! at a little village in a secluded spot," exclaimed Floribel,—"eighty or a hundred miles from London—I really do not know how many—but its name is Elmdale."

"Then everything was ready for the ceremony?" said Agnes, who felt considerably relieved by the ready answer thus given to her question.

"Oh! there was a special license, you know," responded Floribel; "and with that the process is easy enough. Here! look at this album!"—and she bent over the superb book which she had just turned to open upon the table.

"It is very handsome," said Agnes: and in her affectionate solicitude on her cousin's behalf she would fain have asked some more questions relative to the bridal; but she experienced a sensation of diffidence, as if she almost felt that Floribel herself rather avoided the topic every time she approached it.

"You will stay and dine with me, Agnes? Oh, you must pass the remainder of the day! I shall be all alone if you do not—for Theodore has promised to dine with his father, who has a large party."

"Oh, yes—I will stay with you," exclaimed Miss Evelyn; and her heart felt wounded on Floribel's account—for she could not help thinking that it was somewhat cruel for a bride of only ten or eleven days to be thus left for so many hours by her husband.



FLORIBEL.

"And now tell me," said Floribel, "what did people think in our neighbourhood when they heard of what had happened?"

"Oh! let us not speak about it," said Agnes: "it is all past and done now."

"Yes—but tell me a few particulars on the subject," urged Floribel. "Charles De Vere for instance—and his mother——"

"I assured them, and every one else whom I have seen," replied Agnes, "that you had left Sidney Villa to espouse Mr. Clifford; and then there was nothing for them to say. Ah! I should
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tell you that Cicely Neale came to the villa; she was most kind—she stayed with me—and she saved me from a fearful peril which threatened me—or at least she saved the house from being robbed!"

"Saved you, Agnes? Good heavens, my dear cousin! what do you mean? You frighten me!" exclaimed Floribel.

Agnes briefly related the adventure with the supposed burglars. Floribel listened with attention, and with a countenance expressive of the deepest sympathy,—exclaiming when the narrative

was finished, "Good heavens, Agnes! how shocking to think that you should have incurred such a danger! And no clue has been obtained——"

"Not the slightest," responded Miss Evelyn. "In all probability the burglars will never be detected."

The cousins continued in conversation until the hour arrived when it was necessary for Floribel to go up and dress for dinner; for she still retained her morning *negligé*. By the time her toilet was accomplished it was half-past five o'clock, at which hour the dinner was served up. The two cousins sat down together. Agnes could not help sighing as she thought of the bridegroom being absent from his table ere the honeymoon was one third over; and as she glanced at Floribel their eyes met. The colour went and came on Floribel's countenance—for she penetrated what was passing in the mind of Agnes; and in a low voice, which was tremulous despite her endeavour to render it as calm and composed as she could, she said, in a whisper, so as not to be overheard by the servants in attendance, "It is only for a short time, Agnes, that Theodore is thus compelled to sacrifice me as it were to his father. But when a marriage takes place under clandestine circumstances—for the truth *must* be told—everything cannot be completely smooth at first."

Agnes, deeply commiserating her cousin, instantaneously endeavoured to assume a cheerful air: she forced herself to speak with gaiety; and Floribel thanked her with a glance of gratitude. The dinner was exquisitely served, and consisted of dainties sufficient for a dozen persons. But although there were only two, yet all the ceremony of large parties was observed,—the parlour-maid waiting, assisted by Bateman, who stood the whole time at the sideboard, whence he handed to the girl the plate, the finger-glasses, the wines, the dessert, and everything that was required for the complete service of the table.

"I would gladly escape from all this ceremony," said Floribel, when the domestics had withdrawn: "but Theodore is accustomed to it—the servants do it as a matter of course—and it would seem strange if I were to forbid them."

Again Agnes sighed—but this time in so subdued and stifled a manner that her emotion was not noticed by her cousin. Our heroine could not help thinking that such ceremony, as cold as the massive silver plate itself, could scarcely contribute to real domestic comfort or happiness.

After having sat a little while longer at the table, the cousins ascended to the drawing-room, where Floribel begged Agnes to try the splendid piano which Mr. Clifford had purchased for her. It was a magnificent instrument; and Agnes played some lively airs,—not choosing this particular style through any settled purpose at the moment—though when she had finished, the idea stole into her mind that she had done so in order to cheer Floribel's spirits. Then this thought naturally made her ask herself whether her cousin's spirits really required such cheering?—and though she struggled against the impression, yet she could not help feeling that there was a something wanting to convince her that Floribel was indeed perfectly happy. The bridegroom was absent, it is true: but even this circumstance did not seem altogether to account for that senti-

ment of commiseration and sympathy which Agnes found herself entertaining on her cousin's behalf.

"Why should I feel thus?" thought Agnes in her own mind: and she could not satisfactorily reply to the question.

Coffee was presently served, the small china cups being brought upon a massive silver salver; so that this formal ceremony again made the thoughts of Agnes revert to the simpler yet far more comfortable style in which she and her cousin had been wont to have their own tea-table served at Sidney Villa. At length Agnes, observing by the splendid or-molu timepiece that it was nine o'clock, thought it time to depart; and she intimated this much to her cousin.

"I will send you home in the carriage," exclaimed Floribel: and she had darted to the bell-pull before her cousin had time to declare that she should be contented with a humbler mode of conveyance.

The carriage was ordered: and when the servant had retired, Agnes said, "Excuse me, dear Floribel, for speaking to you on a little matter of business: but when once it is settled there will be no further need to revert to it."

"What do you mean, my dear cousin?" inquired Floribel in astonishment.

"I was alluding to our pecuniary affairs," replied Agnes. "Your lamented mother—my own beloved aunt—left us co-heiresses. The half of the income is therefore yours——"

"Agnes, not another syllable upon this point!" exclaimed Floribel. "Everything is now your's! Keep it all, my sweet cousin: you will be the richer—and I am enchanted that it is so; for you know that I am already rich!"

"I shall say no more, then, upon the present occasion," rejoined Agnes; "but remember, Floribel, I shall always hold your share of the income at your disposal. And now I will go and prepare for departure."

"Catharine will accompany you to the chamber," said her cousin, ringing the bell. "Excuse me for not going with you—but I have a few little presents in my writing-desk for Rachel: I will look them out—and I will get you to take them."

Agnes smiled sweetly upon her cousin as she turned to leave the room; for such generous consideration on Floribel's part had not been her usual characteristic; and the amiable Agnes was well pleased that she should thus think of a faithful and devoted servant. On issuing forth upon the landing, Agnes found Catharine ready with the wax-light to conduct her to the chamber: but on arriving there, Miss Evelyn dispensed with the young woman's services. She was accustomed to put on her own bonnet and mantle without any such assistance. Catharine accordingly retired; and Agnes remained alone in the room. It was now that a deep depression seized upon her: she could scarcely account for it—still less could she shake it off; and sinking upon a chair, she burst into tears. A presentiment of something wrong oppressed her mind,—though what it was she dared not allow herself to conjecture. For some minutes so deeply absorbed was she in painful thought, that she did not hear the double knock at the door, which to others announced some arrival. Her feelings obtained full vent: then she hastily wiped her eyes; and blaming her-

self for her weakness—endeavouring to persuade herself too that it was utterly unfounded—she completed her toilet. She now heard the carriage stop at the door; and catching up the taper, she began to descend the stairs.

That double knock at the door to which we have alluded, announced the return of the Hon. Mr. Clifford. His countenance was slightly flushed with wine; and it acquired even a more heightened glow as he sprang up the first ascent of stairs towards the drawing-room. Entering that apartment—and merely swinging the door behind him, without perfectly closing it—he received Floribel in his arms.

“Oh, this is kind of you, Theodore!” she exclaimed. “A full hour before I expected you!”

“The dinner party at my father’s was a very slow affair,” responded Theodore; “and so I got away as soon as I could.”

Floribel did not perceive that the answer was not altogether very complimentary to herself,—implying as it did that if the party had been more agreeable Theodore would not have left it so soon.

“Who do you think is with me?” she exclaimed. “Agnes is here!—she came in the afternoon—she dined with me——”

“I am glad of it, Floribel,” said Clifford. “I wish you to have a little society. But I suppose you have not”—and he hesitated—“you have not, I mean——”

“I know what you would say, Theodore,” said Floribel, in a half mournful voice. “No—I have told her nothing: I dare not! Oh, would to God that I could tell her something that might be satisfactory! But *you*, Theodore—have you spoke to your father? have you succeeded with him?”

“I have broken the ice, my dear girl,” answered Clifford: “I have prepared him—I have dropped a few hints—but I could not say too much to-day, for he was not in the very best of humours.”

“This is unfortunate! most unfortunate!” said Floribel. “Oh, Theodore! there are moments when I feel very, very unhappy——”

“Pray use not this language, my dearest love!” said the young man in the most earnest tone of entreaty. “You will render me likewise very unhappy! I am doing all that I can to ensure your comfort and welfare——”

“Yes—I know it! I know it, dear Theodore!” interjected Floribel, enthusiastically. “Oh, I know that you love me very much!—but you must not indeed be vexed or angry with me if I press you on this point. All the happiness of my life depends upon it; and you know, my beloved Theodore, that I have not uttered a syllable of reproach since that dreadful scene——”

“No, no! you have kept your word, Floribel!” said Theodore quickly: and again did the flush of wine heighten into a ruddier glow upon his countenance. “You have behaved admirably in that respect!”

“And therefore you will reward me as soon as possible,” said Floribel, in an appealing voice, “by the fulfilment of your promise? .Oh, you must do it soon, Theodore!—for I tremble in the presence of my cousin—she asked me a thousand questions—I thought every instant that she would

beg me to show her the marriage certificate—and if she had made such a demand, what reply could I have given? Oh! I would sooner perish than be compelled to look my virtuous cousin in the face and confess that I am not married!”

At this moment a sound as of a candlestick dropping on the landing—instantaneously followed by another sound, like that of the sudden fall of a human form—reached the ears of Theodore and Floribel; and with ejaculations of alarm they both rushed to the door. It had, as we have already said, been negligently left ajar when Mr. Clifford entered; and as Floribel now tore it open, her cousin Agnes was seen stretched motionless upon the landing.

“Great God! she knows all!” cried Floribel, in accents of the most piercing anguish; and she fell back senseless in the arms of Theodore.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE COMPACT.

AT the same time that this scene was taking place at the house in Mayfair, another scene to which we must direct the attention of our readers, was occurring elsewhere.

It was about nine o’clock on this same evening that Cicely Neale alighted from a cab in the neighbourhood of the entrance to the Regent’s Park. She at once dismissed the vehicle, and drew her veil closely down over her countenance. She walked about for a few minutes, as if looking for some one whom she expected to meet there, and who possibly might be unable to recognise her, veiled as she was. At length she accosted a man, who was dressed in a neat suit of black; and she said, “Luke, it is I.”

“I hope I have not kept you waiting long, Miss,” observed the man, who, as the reader will recollect, filled the post of valet to the Hon. Hector Hardress.

“No, no,” responded Cicely. “I have only been here a few minutes. Do you think your master will come?”

“I am sure of it, Miss,” rejoined Luke Corbet.

“Ah!” said Cicely, with this brief and lowly uttered ejaculation expressing her satisfaction. “Tell me everything that occurred—there is yet plenty of time!”

“You know, Miss,” resumed Luke Corbet, “that it was about three o’clock this afternoon when you gave me the note, together with your instructions——”

“And you told me that you did not think your master would return to the house till about five o’clock, so as to be in time to dress for dinner?”

“True, Miss,” answered Corbet; “and it was about ten minutes past five when he returned. I then gave him the note, saying that I had accidentally met in the street the young lady who performed so singular a part at Sidney Villa exactly ten days back, and that she had given me the billet to deliver to him. He seemed dreadfully annoyed, and ejaculated, ‘Ah! I expected something of this sort; for the ten days within which I promised to make her my wife, are just

expiring?—He then read the billet, and a gleam of satisfaction appeared upon his countenance.—‘She writes more temperately than I could have anticipated,’ he said: ‘she desires me to grant her an interview this evening at half-past nine o’clock just within the gates of the Regent’s Park. Perhaps she has become reasonable at last; and she will accept some such terms as those which I hinted at to her a little while ago.’”

If Cicely Neale’s veil had been raised at the moment, Luke Corbet would have seen how scornfully disdainful, how loftily contemptuous was the smile which wreathed the young lady’s full red lips, and how kindred fires flashed forth from her eyes.

‘Ah! he thinks that I am yet to be appeased, and satisfied with gold!’ she muttered to herself: then speaking audibly to Luke Corbet, she said, ‘And so you think it is tolerably certain that he will come?’

‘After all that Mr. Hardress said when I gave him the billet,’ replied Luke, ‘I feel convinced that he will keep the appointment. Of course, Miss, being entirely devoted to your interests, and after all your generosity towards me, I put in a word or two to further your views,—yet taking good care not to excite his suspicion against myself.—‘It is a very ugly business, sir,’ I observed; ‘and I do hope you will be able to settle it.’—‘Well,’ he replied, ‘I think I shall; for Miss Neale must see when she comes to reflect, how impossible it is that I can fulfil the promise which she extorted from me.’—‘Pray bear in mind, sir,’ I added, ‘that if Miss Neale were to show that paper to his lordship your father, it would lead to all sorts of unpleasant inquiries: I should be questioned; for my name, you know, sir, appears as a witness to the document; and everything would inevitably come out in reference to the night entry into Sidney Villa.’—‘Yes, it is indeed very serious,’ said my master; ‘and between you and me, Luke, I would do anything short of marrying Miss Neale to set the affair at rest.’—‘Besides, sir,’ I continued, ‘with all due deference it has struck me that Miss Neale might make another use of the document: she might put it into the hands of a lawyer and sue you for breach of promise of marriage. Her uncle, you know, sir, is an attorney, and is noted as one of the sharpest practitioners in London. It would be a very awkward affair if such a thing took place, and if you had to defend such an action. I should be put in the witness-box.’—‘I see that you are devilishly afraid of yourself,’ interrupted Mr. Hardress, with some show of angry impatience; ‘but the trouble of the affair is much greater for me.’—‘Permit me to observe, sir,’ I rejoined, ‘that I have nothing but my character to depend upon; and if this were lost through an exposure of the share which I had in that business the other night’—‘Heaven forbid that there should be any danger of such a thing!’ ejaculated Mr. Hardress. ‘But pray say no more upon the subject; and trust to me to deal with it successfully.’—That was all that took place; and now, Miss, you know everything.”

‘You are serving me faithfully, Luke,’ replied Cicely; ‘and you know that I am not ungrateful. Here! take this purse—it contains twenty guineas.’

‘A thousand thanks, Miss,’ responded the

valet, bowing profoundly as he pocketed the donation. ‘You may command me in everything.’

‘Do you think,’ asked Miss Neale, ‘that if your master went upon a long journey he would take you with him?’

‘I am almost certain that he would,’ rejoined the valet,—‘unless indeed it was a journey the circumstances of which he wanted to keep very secret.’

‘It is a journey with myself to which I allude,’ interrupted Cicely: ‘and therefore, as you are already acquainted—’

‘Oh! in that case, Miss,’ exclaimed Luke, ‘it is next to certain that Mr. Hardress would take me with him. But might I ask—’

‘Ask me nothing now!’ interrupted Cicely.

‘If he did not take you with him, it were needless for me to enter into explanations; and if he should take you, there will be time enough to give them. Now answer me frankly, Luke. You are still willing to serve me to the very utmost, even at the risk of being suspected or even discovered by your master in so doing?’

‘I am decided!’ rejoined Corbet. ‘Whatever may happen, I have faith in your liberality. If you succeed in bending Mr. Hardress to your purpose, I shall continue in the service of you both: but if you fail, and he should discover that I have been betraying him—’

‘Then I have promised to provide for you!’ ejaculated Cicely; ‘and you have already received more than one earnest of my liberality.’

‘I am contented, Miss,’ answered Corbet, with a bow, ‘to leave myself entirely in your hands.’

‘Tis well!’ said Cicely. ‘But we must now separate; and I will hasten to the appointment which I hope and believe, after all you have told me, your master will keep.’

Cicely Neale then glided away from the spot where this conversation had taken place; and in a few moments she reached those gates of the Regent’s Park, in the immediate vicinity of which she was to meet Hector Hardress. On gaining the place of appointment, she slackened her pace—walked to and fro—and reflected upon the course which she was now adopting. In a few minutes Hector came lounging along, smoking a cigar. He adopted this air of fashionable ease and indolence in order to make Cicely Neale fancy that he cared much less than he in reality did for the position in which he found himself placed towards her. When, therefore, he discerned the young lady—whom he at once recognised by her tall form, the fine contours of her shape, and her upright carriage, notwithstanding that she was so closely veiled—he affected to be all the more listless in his demeanour, so as to seem to be all the more easy in his own mind. But not for an instant was Cicely deceived by this appearance on his part. She now thoroughly comprehended his character and disposition: the letters he had written to Mrs. Chicklade, and which had so recently fallen into Cicely’s possession—together with the information just gleaned from Luke Corbet—had fully enlightened the young lady upon that point; so that she was enabled to smile contemptuously at her seducer’s present attempt to assume a careless, off-hand manner.

‘You have come,’ she said, accosting him in

the neighbourhood of a gas-light in front of the terrace where they thus met.

"Ah, Cicely! is it you?" ejaculated Hector, as if it were only at this moment that he recognised her. "I really did not know you at first!—you are so closely veiled!"

"No matter," said Miss Neale: "you are now convinced that it is I. As for my being closely veiled, it would be fatal to the little reputation which I have yet left, if I were seen meeting a young gentleman at this hour and at this place."

"The little reputation?" echoed Hardress in surprise. "I do not understand you. Who knows of what has happened betwixt you and me? If the reputation of every young lady who has gone a trifle astray, were as safe as your's—"

"You do not understand what I mean—but you shall presently know," interrupted Cicely. "First of all let me remind you," she continued, as they slowly walked together along the terrace, "that the ten days have expired, and that during this interval I have vainly awaited a communication from you."

"Why, my dear girl," ejaculated Hector, "it was I who was waiting to learn what *denouement* it might please you to give to that pleasant little comedy of the other night. Ah! perhaps you will have the kindness to tell me how it happened that I found myself so suddenly confronted with you, pistols in your hands—"

"Listen," interrupted Cicely; "the explanation is soon given,—and I have no objection to afford it. Indeed, it may perhaps be as well; as you will thereby obtain a new insight into my character."

"One is always pleased," said Hardress, in a style that was languidly flippant, "to discover fresh traits of amiability in any young lady—though how the deuce I could reconcile such traits with the presentation of a brace of pistols in those fair hands of your's—"

"If you will listen, I will explain," said Miss Neale, displaying not the slightest emotion of either impatience or anger at the tone and language of the young patrician. "You know that when we met in Fitzroy Square, exactly a month back, I held out certain threats—I bade you beware of my vengeance—because your treatment of me had been infamous and the sense of my wrongs was intolerable. I did not speak inconsiderately nor without a fixed resolution: I went straightway and purchased a pair of pistols. —'If,' said I to myself, 'I ever behold Hector Hardress paying attentions to a rival, here is one pistol to stretch him dead at that rival's feet; and here is another to put an immediate period to my own existence. I shall have been signally revenged, and I can then die!'—'Twas thus that I thought, Hector; and from that instant the weapons have ever been ready to my hand."

Cicely paused for a moment, and then quietly added, "I have them about my person now."

Hector Hardress was no coward, as the reader has seen. He had faced Charles De Vere in a duel; and indeed he possessed a considerable degree of courage. But the announcement made to him by Cicely Neale suddenly smote his heart with an uncontrollable terror; and his countenance became very pale. There was something in the cold quiet deliberation of the voice in which she spoke, that gave a fearful effect to the announcement

which her words conveyed. Everything on her part—all her recent proceedings, at the meeting in Fitzroy Square as well as at Sidney Villa, together with her present conduct—struck Hector as being the result of firm, fierce, yet cold-blooded resolution. His conscience too told him that she was his victim—that the wrongs she had sustained at his hands were immense; and he therefore trembled as he walked by the side of this young lady who had told him that she carried about her person the means of suddenly levelling him dead at her feet!

"You asked for the explanations—and I have given them," said Cicely, in the same quiet tone as before, and without appearing to notice the effect which her words had produced: though in reality through the folds of her veil, her large blue eyes had glanced piercingly and penetratingly upon Hector's countenance. "I went to pass a day or two," she continued, "at Sidney Villa, to keep Miss Evelyn company, afflicted as she was by the sudden flight of her cousin. I sat up reading in my chamber—I heard a voice in her room—and I sped thither with my pistols. Despite your mask I recognised you, as you are aware, in a moment. My first impulse was to shoot you through the brain, that my vengeance might be wreaked in a moment, and under circumstances so unexpectedly favourable that they necessitated not my own self-destruction as the immediate result: for I should have proclaimed that it was a burglar that I had shot:—how was I to suspect that the mask concealed the countenance of the Hon. Mr. Hardress?"

Hector shuddered as he felt the truth of all that Cicely was saying, and thought to what a thread his life had hung for a moment on that particular night. He flung away his cigar: it seemed to produce a sickening sensation;—and he spoke not a word.

"Yes," continued Cicely, still with a calm quietude of tone which was more terribly impressive than the most impassioned emphasis would have been, "my first thought was to kill you on the spot. But a second idea instantaneously flashed to my brain; my plan was suddenly altered—and I compelled you to sign the paper, with your valet as an attesting witness."

"But is it possible, Cicely," asked Hector, now beginning to recover his self-possession, "that you can entertain such horrible ideas towards me—that your vindictiveness can be so terrific?"

"Estimate my wrongs, Hector," responded Miss Neale, "and then calculate what the amount of my vindictiveness might justifiably be. But let us come to the point at once. Do you intend to fulfil your compact?—will you make me your bride? will you conduct me to the altar?"

The young patrician glanced penetratingly towards Miss Neale, to ascertain whether she were feeling beneath her garments to clutch one of the pistols which he firmly believed that she had about her: but he gathered courage on observing that she was walking by his side as quietly and as much without any suspicious movement as at first. He therefore said, yet with a certain hesitation and faltering of tone, "You have asked me whether I am prepared to lead you to the altar? I am sure you scarcely expect that I shall answer yes. But what—what—if I were to say no?"

"I should not be exceedingly astonished," responded Miss Neale. "Indeed, to speak frankly, I came more or less prepared to receive a negative answer from your lips."

"Ah, you are becoming reasonable, my dear girl!" exclaimed Hector, rejoicing at what he conceived to be a corroboration of the impression produced upon his mind by Cicely's billet.

"I must confess, Hector," proceeded Miss Neale, "that during the last ten days I have thought very seriously of the step which I was urging you to take. I reflected that such a marriage would be fraught with only utter misery to us both—"

"Cicely, my dear girl!" ejaculated Hector, in accents of joy and astonishment: "you are indeed reasonable—"

"Pray listen to me," interrupted Miss Neale, mildly but firmly. "Yes—those were my reflections: and perhaps that is the reason why during the ten days which have elapsed since the signing of the compact, I have not demanded its fulfilment."

"Cicely, your conduct is admirable!" cried Hector, seizing her hand and pressing it with a joy, if not with a gratitude, which was most unfeigned.

"Do listen to me, Hector!" she continued: "for if I purpose to release you from the written pledge you have given me, I mean you nevertheless to do me an important service."

"Anything, Cicely! Speak!" cried Hardress.

"Whatever lies in my power—"
"It is a service," pursued Cicely, "which you can easily render, and which will prove exceedingly beneficial to me. But I must give you a few explanations. First of all, then, it appears that one of my deceased mother's rich relatives of whom you once heard me speak—"

"To be sure! I recollect!" cried Hector. "They wanted you to go out into the world as a governess, or something of the sort—you refused—and they withdrew their countenance from you."

"Exactly so," answered Cicely. "Well, one of these relations, an old aunt, residing—Have you ever been to York?"

"Never," replied Hector.

"Well then, residing at York," continued Cicely, "has recently, it appears, been instituting inquiries concerning me. She did not know that I had come to reside in London with Mr. and Mrs. Timperley; and her inquiries were therefore first instituted at Cambridge, where her agent, through whom she was making her investigation, learnt things to my prejudice—perhaps you best know, Hector, how our connexion could have transpired—"

"I call God to witness," ejaculated the young patrician vehemently, "that never did my lips—But Ah! perhaps that infamous woman Mrs. Chicklade—or that other woman, you know, who succeeded her in the occupation of the cottage where we used to meet—may have whispered—"

"Well, no matter," interrupted Miss Neale: "the mischief is done—it signifies not how. Very certain it is that a report has been made to my aunt at York that I was courted by you at Cambridge, and that if we were not privately married we ought to have been—at least for my reputation's sake. Well, my aunt does not seem to have

arrived at the worst conclusion upon the point: on the contrary, she seems to cherish the hope and to cling to the belief that our connexion was an honourable one, but that for certain family reasons you have not as yet dared give publicity to our union. My aunt is exceeding ill—she cannot live many weeks, perhaps not many days: she has thirty thousand pounds to bequeath—and she has written to me a very long letter, in which her decision is made known. Here it is," added Miss Neale, producing a letter from her pocket: "you can read it by the aid of this lamp."

"It is not necessary, my dear girl," replied Hardress: "you can explain its contents."

"Very well, then," said Cicely: "it will save time, for the letter is a long one and is crossed. My aunt tells me therein that if I will visit her, accompanied by my husband—if it be only for a single day—she will make me her heiress—she will leave me her fortune—"

"Too worthy old dame!" ejaculated Hector. "And it is thirty thousand pounds?"

"Yes: she is explicit in her letter. In your estimation," continued Cicely—"you who will one day be so rich—the amount is insignificant: but to me it is immense! Indeed it is an almost fabulous fortune. If I had never known you, Hector,—if this unfortunate connexion had never taken place between us—I should at this moment find myself the heiress to that fortune beyond doubt or questioning. It is through you therefore that I run the risk of losing it; and it is consequently you that are in duty bound to help me to its acquisition."

"By heaven, my dear Cicely!" exclaimed Hardress, "nothing will afford me greater pleasure. And now I comprehend the condition on which you will release me from that compact—"

"Yes—that is the condition," said Miss Neale. "You now understand what I meant by ere now alluding to *as much as was left of my reputation*. It were useless to tell you that after your conduct towards me I continue to entertain any love on your behalf; and therefore, when the other night I made you sign the paper, pledging yourself to lead me to the altar, it was only in the hope of obtaining a good social position and being released from dependence on my relations in Lincoln's Inn Fields. I will not even pretend that I sought to tranquillize any qualm of conscience—to heal my wounded honour—or to repair my injured virtue. No!—in seeking to become your wife, it was simply that I might obtain an independence; for I said to myself, 'He will be compelled to allow me a competency, even if he will not live with me!'—Thus you see that when love was destroyed in my heart, my views became entirely selfish: but this letter of my aunt at York—which reached me yesterday morning—has changed as it were the exigencies and necessities of my position."

"To be sure!" exclaimed Hector Hardress: "a fortune of thirty thousand pounds will settle you in comfort for the rest of your life!"—and he inwardly chuckled at the thought that he should be most effectually rid of her.

"You fully comprehend, therefore," continued Cicely, "that to me this matter is one of the most vital importance. My aunt is already more than half inclined to believe that I am really a legally and honourably wedded wife; and not a single

doubt will remain in her mind if you consent to aid me in the manner which must naturally suggest itself to your understanding."

"Oh, I fully comprehend!" exclaimed Hector Hardress. "It is a little innocent cheat which we must put upon the old lady?"

"Precisely so," responded Miss Neale.

"Then you wish me to accompany you to York?" said Hector inquiringly.

"It is absolutely necessary. You can surely give me three days of your time, when I am absolving you from a compact which, if fulfilled, would devote the whole remnant of your existence unto me!"

"I will give you three days—or five—or seven, for that purpose and on this condition," rejoined Hector. "When do you wish to start?"

"To-morrow morning, by an early train," replied Cicely. "There must be no delay in the matter; for my aunt is very ill——"

"There shall be no delay so far as I am concerned!" exclaimed Hardress. "I can easily get away from London for a week, if it be necessary. I will meet you therefore at the station to-morrow morning——"

"At nine o'clock," said Cicely. "We shall reach York in the evening—we shall first of all repair to an hotel—and thence will I despatch a messenger to my aunt with the intelligence that I have arrived with my husband, and that we both of us solicit permission to pay our respects to her immediately."

"Good!" said Hardress: "lay your plans as you like—and rest assured that when in the presence of your aunt, I will perform to perfection the part of a loving husband towards you. I will call her 'dear aunt,' and will manifest such concern for her illness——"

"If you do all this, Hector," exclaimed Cicely, in a tone that appeared to be full of gratitude, "I shall forgive you for all the past—and we shall be good friends for the future!"

"I am delighted to hear you speak thus," cried Hardress.

"And I am delighted," rejoined Cicely, "to and that you exhibit so much readiness to succour me. Ah! by the bye, my aunt must of course be led to suppose that you are very well off, and that we are not courting her merely for the sake of the money which she has to leave."

"We will go to the best hotel and engage handsome apartments there," exclaimed Hector. "I will take my valet with me—we will live sumptuously—in short, if the old lady, who seems fond of making inquiries, should send any private agent to ask questions at the hotel, everything shall be satisfactory."

"And in this case the fortune will be mine!" said Cicely, at the same time raising her veil and gazing up with an animated countenance at her patrician companion.

"But there is one little thing which has just struck me," said Hardress, who could not help thinking that Miss Neale looked handsomer and more captivating than ever; "and this is that if we play the part of husband and wife for a few days at the hotel—and if we so conduct our proceedings as to satisfy any inquiries which the old lady may make—we must in every particular be-

have as if we were really man and wife. You understand me, Cicely?"

"Yes—I understand you, Hector," said the young lady, bending down her looks. "I have not become a prude—I do not mean to affect a virtue which you know that I possess not. For the time being," she added, in a lower tone, "I will be to you as a wife."

Hector—inspired with some of the former passion with which Cicely's personal charms and voluptuous beauties had filled him—passed his arm round her waist, drew her towards him, and imprinted a kiss upon her lips. She abandoned herself to his embrace for a few moments; and then she disengaged her form from the arms that were thrown about it. They had by this time reached a retired portion of the Park; and they began to retrace their way towards the gates by which they had entered it.

"Tell me, my dear Cicely," said Hector, as they walked along together,— "tell me, now that we are good friends once again, why you came to this appointment armed with your pistols, since it was your purpose to propose so amicable a method of settling the matter?"

"I was not sure that you would consent to assist me," replied Miss Neale: "I feared that in consequence of recent circumstances you might be vindictive against me; and therefore, if you had refused to render me the service which is so vitally important as the only means of giving back happiness to my existence,—if you had refused, I say, I should have killed you first and myself afterwards."

Hector shuddered: but immediately throwing off the disagreeable sensation which these words produced, he said, "Well, it is indeed much better that the business should be thus amicably arranged, and that we should be good friends once more. Besides, the jaunt will be a pleasant one under all circumstances; and I shall have the happiness of being with you again, for a short while; for I love you, Cicely—and family reasons alone have prevented me from making you my wife."

"We will not discuss the past," answered Miss Neale: and then she added in a gay tone, "Besides, you must recollect that while we are together we are to maintain all the affectionate appearance of man and wife. Here we separate. Farewell for the present, Hector."

Cicely gave him her hand, which he pressed: and she then hurried away, again drawing down her veil.

On issuing from the Regent's Park, Cicely took a cab and proceeded to the Strand. It was now late: but she found a chemist's shop open. She entered it, and purchased some laudanum,—alleging that it was for the toothache, though she had never suffered from such an indiction in all her life, her teeth being pure and sound, without speck or blemish. Having made her purchase, she returned to Lincoln's Inn Fields—where she had some ready-invented tale to account not only for her absence of that evening, but likewise for the journey she purposed to undertake on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PORT WINE.

AT a quarter before nine on the ensuing morning, Cicely Neale alighted from a cab at the terminus in Euston Square; and she was immediately joined by the Hon. Hector Hardress, who had already arrived. At a little distance stood Luke Corbet, carrying in his hand a small portmanteau containing his master's effects.

"I have already taken the tickets," said Hector, pressing the hand which Cicely proffered him; "and by means of a small bribe I have obtained the promise of a compartment for ourselves. We shall be all alone together; and we can converse on the part which we have to perform. My servant of course travels second-class."

Hector and Cicely took their seats in the compartment which the guard of the train was keeping for their special accommodation; while Luke Corbet—who had received a significant glance from Miss Neale—announced himself in a second-class carriage. The bell rang—there was the usual rush of passengers to their seats—the usual hurrying to and fro of porters and other officials—and then the train moved on.

Cicely Neale displayed a most amiable demeanour towards Hector Hardress; so that it even appeared as if she had never experienced a cause to smart on account of any wrongs endured at his hands. She smiled and conversed gaily; she permitted his caresses; and after a while she returned them, just as she was wont to do in past times at the cottage in the neighbourhood of Cambridge. Hardress was completely happy. He had not only freed himself, as he thought, from the persecutions of Cicely, from her vindictiveness, and from the consequences of the compact signed at Sidney Villa,—but he had got back a mistress whom he liked as such, though he never loved her sufficiently to think for a moment of making her his wife. To him the whole affair was a perfect pleasure-excursion: he rejoiced in the excitement of railway-travelling—he had a handsome and agreeable companion—and he moreover promised himself no small degree of amusement in duping and enjoling the old aunt at York. On the other hand, Cicely was really in excellent spirits; for she foresaw the complete success of the deep-laid scheme which she had in hand.

The hours passed away; and at length a halt of about twenty minutes was made to enable the passengers to take refreshments. Hardress and Cicely alighted as well as the rest; and Miss Neale at once sought an opportunity of saying a word to Luke Corbet, unperceived by his master. This opportunity was obtained; and she hastily whispered to the valet, "Mr. Hardress will presently desire you to put a bottle of Port and glasses in our compartment. Mind that you pour the contents of this phial into the bottle! Everything that I have in view depends upon it."

She slipped into Luke's hand the phial of laudanum which she had purchased in London on the preceding evening; and the valet darted upon her a significant look, as much as to imply that her instructions should be obeyed to the very letter.

Cicely then hastened to rejoin Hector Hardress at the refreshment-table; and they commenced their luncheon. He ordered sherry: but Cicely said to him, "You know that I never drink it!"—adding with a smile, "It always tastes to me like antimonial wine!"

"What will you have, then?" inquired Hector.

"Some Port—which I will mix with water."

"Then I will take Port likewise," added Hector: and the command was given to the waiter accordingly.

"I am no judge of wine," said Cicely when the Port was supplied: "but this appears to be excellent."

"Yes—it is very good," observed Hardress: "and it is a pity that they allow us so short a time to procure our refreshments here—for I could drink a pint of this wine to my infinite comfort and satisfaction."

"What is to prevent you from having a bottle placed in the railway-carriage?" asked Cicely.

"You can order some biscuits likewise: and I should infinitely prefer such a luncheon to this cold meat," she added, pushing the plate away from her. "Besides, I wish to see you enjoy yourself—you shall smoke your cigar—you know that I do not care about it—and the compartment is all to ourselves."

Hector was delighted to find Miss Neale thus amiable; and he readily agreed to her proposition.

"There is your valet," said Cicely, glancing towards the door, at which Luke Corbet was lounging so as to be in readiness to be summoned. "Bid him place in the carriage all that we require."

Hector accordingly beckoned Luke to approach; and the instructions were given. When Hector and Cicely resumed their seats in their own compartment, they found a decanter of Port-wine, a couple of glasses, a paper-bag containing biscuits and cakes, and half-a-dozen cigars, in readiness for use. The train moved on; and Cicely, still with a most amiable smile, said, "Now light your cigar, Hector—and suffer me to perform the duties of cup-bearer."

"Why not say Hebe at once?" asked Hector, likewise smiling as he paid this compliment, which he followed up with a kiss upon the full red lips of his companion.

"You are indeed a kind and most affectionate husband," she said, laughing gaily; "and you shall see how attentive I can be as a wife."

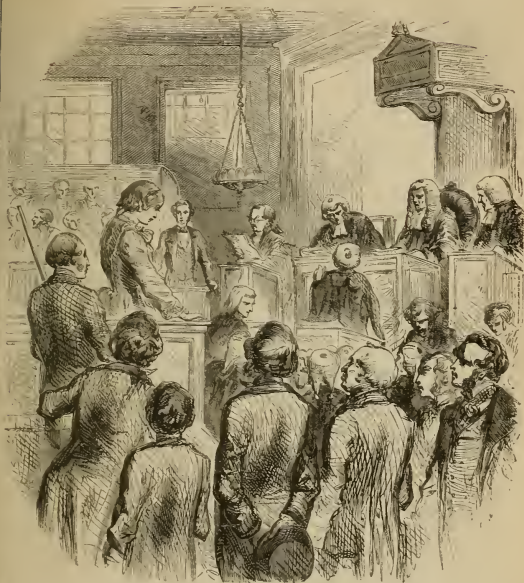
"And the old lady at York," added Hector, also laughing heartily, "shall pronounce us the most loving couple she ever saw in her life. But are you sure that the smoke will not annoy you?" he inquired as he took up a cigar.

"I am no fastidious young lady," responded Cicely, smiling.

Hector accordingly lighted the cigar; while Miss Neale began to eat one of the little cakes from the paper-bag.

"And now," she said, "since I have set myself up as a judge of wine to-day, I will pass my opinion on this fresh supply of Port."

She filled a glass—took one sip of its contents—and said, laughing, "I don't know whether it is that being in such good spirits I am prepared to enjoy everything to-day—but really it strikes me



I never before appreciated the merits of wine. Ah, there is a beautiful country-seat!"

And as Hector turned his looks in the direction indicated by Miss Neale, she from the other window, which was open, tossed out the remaining contents of the glass which she held in her hand. It was done in the twinkling of an eye; and when Hector turned towards her again, she seemed as if she were just finishing the process of imbibing the wine with her lips.

"Well, my dear girl," cried Hector, laughing, "I do indeed think that wine must be to your taste;—and now you shall perform the part of Hebe to me."

Cicely was about to take up the other glass: but Hardress, who was playfully happy, insisted that he would drink out of the same glass as his fair companion: so she filled it accordingly.

"Ah!" he said, as he swallowed about half the

contents; "cigars and Port-wine do not go well together. The former seem to impart a queer kind of acrid taste to the latter," he continued. "But never mind! it is my fault if I spoil good wine by means of the weed."

He finished the contents of the glass, and went on puffing his cigar. Cicely Neale rattled away in a joyous strain: she talked incessantly. Hector was delighted: he thought he had never found her so agreeable; and he still fancied likewise that he had never seen her looking so handsome. After awhile she filled him another glass, the contents of which he drank; and he took another cigar. Presently he remarked with a smile that she was not doing justice to the luncheon of her own choice; so she ate another cake, and half filled a glass with wine,—observing, "It is really excellent: but I am compelled to be more moderate than you."

Hardress began to feel rather drowsy: but he

endeavoured to shake off this inclination to slumber; and Cicely again pointed out some object of interest in the distance. Hector turned to look at it; and again were the contents of Miss Neale's glass tossed from the window. Again too after a little while, Cicely's fair hand presented a bumper to Hardress: and he, with an effort against his increasing drowsiness, drank off the wine.

Soon afterwards his eyelids felt as if they were being weighed down; and he said, "I am afraid, Cicely, I have taken too much wine—or else it must be these cigars—they are uncommonly strong—travelling too always makes me sleepy—"

"Then why should you not sleep?" ejaculated the amiable Miss Neale. "Come! take this seat next to me—pillow your head on my shoulder—and I will watch over you. You know," she added gaily, "I must study how to play the part of an affectionate wife, the better to deceive the dear old aunt at York."

Hector—who now felt himself totally incapable of struggling against the increasing sense of drowsiness—placed himself next to Cicely, and pillowed his head upon her bosom. She threw her arm around him, and began to hum a tune as if she were rocking a child to sleep.

"This is delicious!" murmured Hector, in a low languid voice: and in a few minutes he slept profoundly.

Several hours passed—during which many little incidents occurred, in which Cicely and Luke Corbet were the principal actors; while Hector Hardress continued in a state of profound unconsciousness. Four or five times during the lapse of these hours, more of the drugged wine was poured down his throat, so as to retain him in that state of stupefaction—Cicely being careful, however, not to administer an excessive dose.

When Hector began slowly to awaken from the long trance into which he had been plunged, he strove to collect his ideas. But his head ached fearfully, and his thoughts were all in confusion. At length he became aware that he was in bed—that he was not alone—and that a light was burning in the room. It was a strange room—he had never been there before. Vague and jumbled recollections of railway travelling—Miss Neale—Port-wine and cigars, began arising in his mind: but he thought that he must be dreaming—until contemplating the countenance of his companion, who appeared to sleep, he recognised Cicely. Then he pressed his hand to his brow, and began to reflect more deliberately, until he so settled all his ideas that he remembered everything that had taken place down to the period when he fell asleep with his head reposing on Cicely's bosom. But not for a single instant did he suspect that any treachery had been played upon him, or that the wine was drugged.

And now, as he again turned his looks towards Cicely Neale, her large blue eyes opened—her full red lips parted with a gay smile; and throwing her arms round his neck, she said, "Why, my dear Hector, the cigars and the wine did indeed produce an effect upon you! You were quite tipsy—unless it were—"

"Egad! I must have been so!" he ejaculated.

"But where are we?"

"Where should we be but at York?" responded

Cicely. "Did you not say that we were to put up at the best hotel and engage the handsomest apartments?"

"To be sure! all right!" ejaculated Hardress "But what o'clock is it?"

Cicely at once took her watch from beneath the pillow; and though the hands indicated three o'clock in the morning, she said quietly and collectedly, "It is just half-past eleven."

The fact was that they had not been at the hotel for more than about three hours: but it did not suit her purpose to let Hardress know how late they had arrived there.

"Half-past eleven!" he exclaimed. "Then how long have we been in bed?"

"You, my dear Hector, were put to bed the moment you were brought into the house," replied Cicely: "but I did not retire till ten o'clock. I did all I could to awake you—as did Luke likewise: but we could not possibly succeed."

"This is extraordinary!" said Hardress. "I never slept so before. I have a dreadful pain in the head—"

"Now, don't be alarmed, Hector," said Cicely: "but I do verily believe that you had a rush of blood to the head; for while you were sleeping in the train, your countenance was so flushed—you breathed so heavily—and when we arrived at York, it was impossible, as I have already said, for Luke and me to arouse you. But you are better now?"

"Well, I don't know. I am awake—and that's all that can be said. My head aches frightfully—my tongue is parched—I would give the world for some soda-water!"

"Just what I foresaw!" ejaculated Cicely, as she leapt out of bed. "I ordered some to be placed in the room."

"How kied of you!" said Hardress: and the next moment he received a tumbler of the refreshing beverage from the fair hand of Miss Neale. "What the deuce will the people of the house think?" he continued, as he gave her back the glass. "They of course supposed that I was dead drunk; and here is a pretty beginning for this old aunt of yours! If it gets to her ears, she will form a nice estimate of my character!"

"All this I have taken care of," replied Cicely, as she returned to her place in the couch; "and Luke was duly tutored by me. I represented that you had been seized with a fit—"

"Admirable Cicely!" cried Hardress. "It was the best thing you could do. But what a ready invention you possess!"

"Yes—a very ready one," she said, laughing: but there was a hidden meaning in her words. "You must keep your chamber all day to-morrow; and I will not communicate with my aunt until the day after. If she do not learn when we arrived, we need offer no excuse for the delay in paying our respects to her: but if she should find it out, we need only repeat the same story which I have told the servants of the hotel—and we may throw in a little pathos about the delicate state of your health—the excitement of travelling—and so forth."

"True!" said Hardress: "and as for keeping my chamber, I really think that I shall be compelled to do so; for I feel downright ill."

"It must have been a flow of blood to the

head," observed Cicely; "for you did not drink so very much wine after all. I had my share of it, as you know; and it produced not the slightest effect upon me."

"Then it *must* have been an effusion of blood," rejoined Hector. "I will consult the family physician when I get back to London. But how was I got to the hotel?"

"Luke and I placed you in a hackney-vehicle," answered Cicely; "and we brought you hither. The moment the chaise stopped at the door, out came the waiters. 'Can I have apartments,' I said, 'for my husband and myself, and for our domestic?'—The response was immediately in the affirmative.—'My husband Mr. Hardress is very ill,' I said; 'he has had a fit, to which I regret to say he is liable: but he will be well in a day or two.'—The waiters assured me that every attention should be paid you: you were borne into the hall; and there the landlady herself came forward to render her succour."

"You told Luke," said Hector, "to keep up the story that we were man and wife?—for previous to our setting off I had only just hinted to him——"

"I really said nothing on the subject," interrupted Miss Neale. "I could not look the man in the face and tell him such a thing—although he knows very well that I am travelling with you as your mistress. But you best know whether he is discreet or not?"

"Oh, he is discretion itself!" rejoined Hector: "and now that I bethink me, I gave him sufficient instructions—Besides, even if I had not, the fellow would not run out of his way to let the people of the hotel into the secret. Whenever a gentleman travels with a lady in this way, she always passes as his wife."

"Well, then, there is no fear," said Cicely, as if completely reassured. "But now compose yourself to sleep—and you will be better in the morning."

There was already a drowsiness coming over Hector Hardress: he yielded to it; and in a few minutes he again slept profoundly. When he next awoke he found himself alone: but the light of day was now shining brightly in at the windows. Cicely, with her toilet only half achieved, emerged from an adjoining dressing-room, on hearing Hector move in the couch; and throwing her arms about his neck, she inquired how he felt.

"A little better—but only a little," he answered. "I have a strange heaviness in the head——"

"Another sign," ejaculated Cicely, "that it must have been an effusion of blood! Remain in bed—I will see about your breakfast almost immediately—and I will pass the whole of the day with you in this chamber."

Miss Neale hastened back into the dressing-room, where she speedily finished her toilet: and she then rang the bell for one of the servants of the establishment.

A chambermaid soon appeared: and Cicely said, "My husband is too ill to get up to breakfast: he will take it in bed. Will you not, dear Hector?"

"I think I had better, my dearest wife," responded Hardress, who thought it requisite to appear as uxoriously affectionate as she seemed to be fondly tender.

The chambermaid inquired what the lady and gentleman would like for their breakfast?—and Cicely gave her the needful instructions.

"What a strange sound this Yorkshire dialect has!" observed Hardress, when the young woman had retired. "It is not unlike the Scotch."

"By no means unlike," replied Cicely; "and I have often heard the same thing remarked before."

The chambermaid soon reappeared: she spread the breakfast-table; and Cicely hastened to supply Hector with his repast. He however felt sick at the stomach, and could scarcely force himself to swallow two or three mouthfuls of toast; though he was faint for want of food. He however drank a considerable quantity of tea; and this beverage refreshed him somewhat.

Scarcely was the breakfast over, when there was a gentle tap at the door; and Cicely hastened to see who was there. It was the landlady, who had come to inquire after Hector's health. As she was an elderly matron, Cicely at once asked her to walk in; and the landlady, advancing into the middle of the room, said, "I hope, sir, you find yourself better this morning?"

"Why, thank you, the tea has refreshed me a little," replied Hector; "but still, as I was just saying to Mrs. Hardress——"

"His head is still very bad," said Cicely; "and even the slightest sound makes it ache worse. I mean to keep him quiet all day in this chamber."

"That's right," said the landlady. "But do you not think, ma'am, that medical advice——"

"My wife will tell you," exclaimed Hector, "that I cannot endure the sight of a doctor——"

"That is perfectly true," interrupted Miss Neale: then hastily turning to the landlady, she said, "Leave us now; for talking only makes his head worse."

"I am going, ma'am," replied the landlady. "But permit me to observe that every attention which can be shown——"

"Yes, yes—I know it; and I thank you," interjected Hardress. "My wife has told me how kind you were last night——"

The landlady's countenance suddenly wore a singular expression—as well it might, on hearing herself thus thanked for something she had not done; for she was in bed asleep when the guests arrived at the hotel. Cicely hastened to escort the worthy matron to the door; and as it closed behind her, Hector said, "Well, on my soul! the more I hear the people of this establishment speak, the more I am struck by the peculiarity of the Yorkshire dialect. I did not think it was like what I find it to be."

"It is indeed peculiar," answered Cicely.

Hours passed on: Hector remained in bed—and Miss Neale sat by the side of the couch, conversing with him, or reading to him from a book which she had found in their sitting-room.

At length it was time to think of ordering dinner; and Hector now found himself so much better that he expressed his ability to partake of something at that repast. He proposed to summon the chambermaid: but Cicely exclaimed with a laugh, "What?—do you imagine she will know anything about the larder? Let us ring for the waiter."

The bell was accordingly rung: the chamber-

maid answered the summons; but she was desired to send up the waiter. In a few minutes the waiter made his appearance; and with a bow he expressed a hope that Mr. Hardress felt better.

"My husband is decidedly better," said Cicely: then in a whisper to Hector, she added, "These people are all determined to overwhelm us with their civilities."

"What would you like for dinner, sir?" asked the waiter, shifting his napkin from beneath the right arm to the left, because a hotel-waiter always seems as if he felt himself bound to accompany his queries with a business-like gesture.

"Oh, I must leave it to my wife!" exclaimed the young patrician. "Settle the matter with Mrs. Hardress."

Cicely forthwith proceeded to order such little delicacies as might appear best calculated to tempt the appetite of the invalid; and the waiter retired to communicate his instructions to the cook. Hector now thought that he was well enough to get up and move into the sitting-room, so that he might enjoy his dinner with all the more comfort; and Miss Neale offered no objection to the proposal. The young patrician found himself refreshed by his ablutions: the fact of moving about in the room likewise tended to dispel the remnant of giddiness which he had experienced; and by the time dinner was in readiness to be served up, Hector was also in readiness to partake of it.

The apartment where he now rejoined Cicely, was well lighted and handsomely furnished. It was the commencement of November: the weather was exceedingly cold—a magnificent fire blazed in the grate—and the draperies of the windows were closed. The table was neatly laid; and a smoking tureen of soup was soon placed thereon. Hector did justice to it: then followed fish, poultry, game, and sweets in due succession; and Cicely's patrician companion contrived to make an excellent repeat. He drank a few glasses of wine: his spirits rose—he was in an excellent humour—and as he contemplated Miss Neale, he thought to himself that she was a superbly grown young woman, and that he should not at all mind if his present trip with her was extended to a few weeks instead of a few days, so long as she did not ask him to make her his wife in reality. Presently—during the interval between the dessert and the entrance of coffee—Hector, rising from his chair, lounged towards one of the windows. Pulling aside the curtains, he looked through the paces into the wide street in which the hotel was situated; and as he contemplated the features of that thoroughfare by the light of the gas-lamps, he exclaimed, "Well, I had not an idea that York was so fine a city!"

"Ah! I recollect," said Miss Neale, "you mentioned, I think, when we were in London, that you had then never been to York?"

"Never," answered Hector: "this is the first time. Whereabouts is the Cathedral?"

"Somewhere in that direction," rejoined Cicely, who was now standing by his side at the window.

"And where may your delectable old aunt live?" inquired Hector, with a gay laugh.

"I only know the name of the street," responded Cicely: "but I am ignorant of its whereabouts. This is likewise my first visit to York."

"The longer I contemplate these lofty build-

ings, their style of architecture, and their general appearance," continued Hector, "the more do they remind me of the streets in Edinburgh."

"Indeed?" ejaculated Cicely. "Then Edinburgh must be a very fine city?"

"Yes—some portions of it," responded Hardress,—"all the new part. But what on earth is that great towering object we behold yonder? I declare that it looks exactly like Edinborough Castle?"

"Why, that is York Castle, to be sure," rejoined Cicely. "It is a famous building, as I have read in books and have often been told. Come, my dear Hector," she added, throwing her arm round his neck, "let us return to the cheerful fire; for everything looks so bleak and cold out of doors, that it makes me shudder with a glacial chill."

The young patrician pressed his lips to those of Cicely as her countenance was upturned towards him; and he suffered her to lead him back to his seat. Coffee was soon afterwards served up; and by the time the fragrant Mocha beverage was discussed it was ten o'clock. Miss Neale suggested that they should retire to rest, for fear that Hector might do himself harm by sitting up too long. He had no objection to withdraw in such compassion; and they accordingly sought their chamber.

When they rose in the morning, Hardress found himself perfectly well; and he was in excellent spirits.

"Now, my dear girl," he said, laughing gaily as they sat down together at the breakfast-table, to which Cicely at once hurried him without giving him time to have a single peep from the window of the sitting-room, "we must soon think of letting the dear old aunt know that we are at York."

"Yes, Hector—we can delay it no longer," replied Cicely. "Oh, I promise you," she exclaimed, now laughing in her turn, "we shall have some excellent amusement! But I was thinking how it would flatter the old lady if you yourself were to write her a little note, to be enclosed with mine."

"And why shouldn't I?" asked Hector. "By all means let us keep up the joke! There! I have done eating! You may pour me out another cup of coffee—and I will pen the note while you finish your breakfast."

"Oh! I have also finished," cried Miss Neale. "Stay! here are writing-materials. What fun it is, to be sure!"—and Cicely laughed so as to display her brilliant teeth.

The next moment she spread out an open portfolio on the table before Hector: she arranged a sheet of paper—she dipped the pen in the ink—and she placed it in his hand, at the same time bending down and imprinting a caress upon his forehead.

"Now you must dictate to me what I am to say," exclaimed Hector. "We will of course begin by putting 'York, November the third'—"

"No, no! never mind that now!" interrupted Cicely Neale: "let us make haste! Come, begin with 'My dear Madam,'"

"Very well!" said Hector, laughing: "have it your own way! And now proceed."

Cicely accordingly dictated the letter which Hector wrote; but both dictation and writing were frequently interrupted by merry peals of

laughter as well as by the playful exchange of caresses. The letter, when completed, ran in the following manner:—

"My dear Madam,

"Although this is the first time I have ever had the honour and pleasure of addressing you, I have nevertheless long known you well by repute; for your niece, my beloved Cicely, has frequently mentioned you to me in the most affectionate terms. Believe me, therefore, when I convey to you the assurance that it will afford me infinite gratification to make your acquaintance; and I hope to have this pleasure with the least possible delay. If I did not perform that which was no doubt a duty in asking your assent to the alliance of your niece Cicely with myself, it was because I feared lest from any reason an obstacle should be thrown in the way of our union. This declaration will serve as a proof of my deep affection for her whom I am proud and happy to call my wife; and I am confident that when we present ourselves to you, you will look smilingly upon us and give us your blessing. Believe me, my dear aunt—for so you must now permit me to call you—the love I bear for your dear Cicely is only equalled by the pride with which I shall in a very short time present her to my family. If there has been anything secret and clandestine in the circumstances attending our union, it arose entirely from family reasons: but I am resolved that I will act in a way that becomes a man who has no cause to blush for the partner whom he has taken unto himself. I could say much more: but I prefer withholding additional explanations until I have the pleasure of accompanying my wife into your presence,—an opportunity which I hope will be afforded me with the least possible delay.

"Believe me, my dear aunt,

"Your's most dutifully,

"HECTOR HARDRESS."

"Excellent!" ejaculated Cicely, lavishing caresses upon the young patrician: "nothing could be better! This will have its effect!"

"And now you must write *your* note," said Hardress.

"Oh, it is already written and put into an envelope duly addressed!" cried Cicely, as she gaily disengaged herself from the arm which Hector had thrown about her waist: then, having rung the bell, she said, "See! I put your letter inside my own—both under the same cover. Here! lend me your ring with the crest on it, to seal the envelope."

Hardress complied with the demand: he also folded and held a piece of paper to enable Cicely to melt the wax for the sealing of the letter. That seal was stamped with the young patrician's crest; and by the time this was done the waiter entered the room in answer to the summons of the bell.

"Bid our valet step up, if you please," said Miss Neale.

"Yes, ma'am!"—and the waiter withdrew.

Cicely kept Hardress talking in front of the fire until Luke made his appearance; and then bounding towards the valet, she exclaimed, "Take this immediately—to the post!" she added, suddenly sinking her voice to a whisper, and darting upon Corbet a significant look.

"Yes, Miss," replied the valet: and he instantaneously quitted the room.

At the same moment Hector Hardress lounged towards the window; and on gazing through the panes, he was struck by the spectacle which met his view.

"Good heavens, Cicely!" he exclaimed, "if I did not know that we were at York I could swear that this was Edinburgh! But if ever in my life I saw Edinburgh Castle—And by heavens! there is something exactly like Scott's Monument! Good God! the railway-station too!—and this is Princes Street! Cicely, we are in Edinburgh!"

"Yes—we are in Edinburgh," replied Miss Neale, with a tone, look, and manner of calm quiet confidence.

"Cicely! what does it mean?" asked the young patrician, contemplating Miss Neale with affright and dismay, and with suspicions of some treachery agitating in his mind, though he knew not what it was that he suspected. "Cicely!" he repeated with vehemence, "what does it mean, I ask?"

"It means," she rejoined, in the same collected manner as before, "that I am your wife according to the law of Scotland—and this law holds good in England."

A cry—or rather yell of savage rage burst from the lips of Hector Hardress, as the whole truth blazed upon him like a flood of overwhelming light. He made one bound forward to dash Cicely upon the floor: but her demeanour overawed him; and with a hollow moan he sank annihilated upon a seat.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE STRATEGIC MARRIAGE.

YES—so dignified, yet without the slightest arrogance, was the mien of Cicely Neale—so full of confidence, yet without any display of overweening triumph, was her look—so resolute her bearing for the purpose of self-defence—that Hector Hardress was overawed and discomfited. Her tall form was drawn up to its full height: there was a gentle flush upon her cheeks—there was the steadiness of a heroine in her gaze; and yet with all that queenliness of demeanour, there was the indescribable gloss of a lady's elegance and grace over all.

Hector Hardress was ghastly pale: his under jaw had fallen as if the hand of death were upon him: his half-open mouth afforded a singularly vacant expression to blend with the look of dismay and consternation which otherwise marked his countenance. He lay back rather than sat in the chair, his eyes riveted upon Cicely—his whole demeanour seeming as if the fierce rage of the hyena had been suddenly subdued in the overawed pusillanimity of the spaniel. Never was a woman more imposing in her calm dignity than Miss Neale at that moment!—never was a man more completely cowed, crushed, and overwhelmed than Hardress at that same time!

There was a deep silence for upwards of two or three minutes; and then Cicely, breaking that pause, said in a calm, quiet tone, "If you value

your own self-respect, Hector—and if you would avoid drawing down the laugh of ridicule on your head—you will abstain from any disturbance within the walls of this hotel."

"By God!" vociferated Hardress, springing up from his seat, "it is the foulest trick—But pshaw! it can't possibly hold good!"

"Do not endeavour to delude your mind with this fallacious hope," responded Cicely. "The most foolish of all men is he who deceives himself."

"But it is a cheat—a fraud!" cried Hector, the fury of whose rage was subdued by the sickening sense of the fact that there might be really more validity in his acknowledgment of Miss Neale as his wife than he was willing to admit. "It is utterly impossible that I can be held bound by any such absurd stratagem! What? just because I have called you *my wife* in the presence of a servant or two——"

"Listen, Hector!" interrupted Cicely; "and at least study to envisage your position in all its bearings. Not for a moment do I hesitate to confess that a trick has been perpetrated on my part: but let us see to what extent all its details are ramified. In the first place I have your agreement, duly signed and attested, to the effect that in ten days you will make me your wife. At the expiration of that time we appear in Edinburgh: you speak of me as your wife in the presence of the chambermaid, the landlady, and the waiter: you call me *Mrs. Hardress*—you seem in their estimation to be straining for every opportunity to give them to understand and to impress it upon them that I *am* really your wife. But you do more! You write to my aunt, telling her that I am your wife—apologizing for our clandestine union—declaring that you will shortly present me to your family—invoicing that aunt's blessing——"

"Oh, but this is monstrous, Cicely!" exclaimed Hector, stamping his foot with impotent rage. "That aunt of yours is doubtless a creation of the fancy!"

"What?" ejaculated Miss Neale, laughing: "Mrs. Timperley a creation of the fancy?"

"Mrs. Timperley!" echoed Hardress, with renewed consternation.

"Yes, to be sure!" rejoined Cicely: "that is the aunt to whom you have written; and the letter has already gone to the post, enclosed in one from myself, dated from Edinburgh, and written in a strain not very dissimilar to your own."

Once more was Hardress rendered utterly agast: he was crushed and overwhelmed. But suddenly recollecting something, he exclaimed furiously, "Then that villain Luke is your accomplice!"

"An accomplice do you call it?" said Miss Neale quietly. "Well, I at once admit that he has succoured me in my undertakings——"

"Ah, by heaven! I suspect something!" ejaculated Hector, upon whose brain light after light was bursting. "That scene at Sidney Villa—tell me, Cicely, it was not accidental—you were forewarned—you were there on purpose—it was all a deep-laid plot—and this is the result?"

"It is useless for us now to descend into these details," replied Cicely. "Let us speak of those things which immediately concern us. I have

confessed that Luke Corbet has aided me on several occasions. I like not a spy any more than you can like him: the man who has sold his services to me at a price, would sell them to any one else for a higher bribe. Therefore, if you and I are to live together, I should propose to reward him liberally and discharge him, but with a character that will obtain for him a situation elsewhere. If, on the contrary," continued Miss Neale, speaking as if the alternatives which she thus put were a matter of indifference to her, "we do not live together, you ran of course dispose of your valet as you like—but I shall reward him."

While Miss Neale was thus speaking, Hector Hardress was reflecting with a calmer deliberation than he had yet experienced since the development of the stratagem whereof he was the dupe. He saw that if he were really tied by indissoluble bonds to Cicely—if she were indeed his lawful wife—it would be useless for him to assume a hostile attitude; for by so doing the whole truth would become known to the world and he would be unmercifully laughed at in society. If therefore the marriage was actually valid, he felt that it would be better to make a merit of necessity, to put a good face upon the affair, and to pretend that it was altogether a love-match; so that instead of experiencing ridicule, he would become the object of additional interest in the sphere in which he moved. He in consequence resolved to take advice upon the subject, and ascertain exactly how he really *did* stand with regard to his lady-companion.

It must not however be supposed that because he came to this determination, or because he was enabled to reflect deliberately, he was either completely cool or resigned to his lot. Nothing of the sort. It was merely that his rage was much subdued by the consciousness of the inutility of displaying it, and that he felt himself to be in a position where it was advisable to act with policy rather than with passion.

"Cicely," he said, "I am going out for an hour. I do not hesitate to confess that my object is to ascertain to what extent I am really enmeshed by the coils you have laid to ensnare me."

"By all means do so!" responded Cicely, with an air of calm confidence. "I cannot have the slightest objection. But remember that if you run away altogether, I shall not be the less your wife—and I shall hasten to London to seek you at your father's mansion."

"I pledge myself," rejoined Hector, "that I will come back in one hour. Whatever be the result of the inquiries I am about to institute, you and I must come to an amicable understanding together."

"No doubt of it," answered Cicely.

Hector inclined his head slightly by way of salutation—snatched up his hat—and hastened from the room. He met Luke Corbet upon the stairs; but he stopped not to say a word to his valet: he was determined to take no step of any important nature until he should have first consulted an advocate with respect to his true position towards Cicely.

Immediately after his departure from the hotel, Luke Corbet—who had been upon the watch, and who was most anxious to know how matters pro-

gressed—ascended to the apartment where Cicely remained.

"May I hope, Miss—ma'am—Mrs. Hardress," said Luke, not exactly knowing how to address the young lady, "that all goes well? I know that the mystery must be discovered this morning: I felt convinced it could not be maintained any longer; and when you gave me that letter to put in the post—"

"And that letter has gone to the post?" inquired Cicely.

"Yes, Miss—within five minutes after it was in my hand," was the response.

"Everything progresses according to my best wishes, Luke," said Miss Neale. "I feel convinced that in another hour I shall be recognised as your master's wife. But whatsoever may be the result, here is a handsome reward for you. You have served me well and faithfully."

Thus speaking, she placed bank-notes to the amount of a hundred pounds in Luke's hand; and the valet expressed his gratitude in words and with many profound salutations.

"I think all was managed excellently, Miss?" said the man. "The wise did its work—and the shiftings from one railway line to another passed off admirably."

"It was impossible that anything could have been better," replied Cicely. "But, as I told you at the time, everything depended on that wine."

Luke withdrew; and Cicely waited in calm confidence for Hector's return. When she was again alone in the room, she did not give way to any passionate outburst of exultation—she did not abandon herself to any enthusiastic ebullition of joy: her demeanour was that of one who had successfully accomplished a scheme which from the very outset she had been certain of achieving. The reader must not however suppose, from these observations, that she was indifferent with regard to this success: on the contrary, there was a deep inward satisfaction—but it was rational, sedate, and without agitation.

In about an hour Hector returned. He was very pale; but the expression of his countenance was that of a calm firmness, as if he had resolved on some particular course to be pursued. He closed the door; and taking off his hat, advanced towards Cicely, saying with a slight bow, "I recognise you as Mrs. Hardress."

Cicely had foreseen this: she felt convinced that such would be the course into which Hector would find himself by circumstances impelled. Nevertheless, when thus recognised as a wife—when addressed in this manner for the first time without fiction or pretence—when suddenly struck by the consciousness that she was no longer a dishonoured young woman in her own estimation, but that she could lift her head high and look the world in the face—she *did* now at length experience a strong enthusiasm of the feelings; and for a moment they so far overpowered her that she sank down upon a seat, quivering with emotion. She could have wept: indeed up to the very brims of her eyelids rose the tears—but by a strong effort she kept them back; and recovering her self-possession, she said, "You are now convinced, Hector, that I have in nothing miscalculated the effects of my proceedings?"

"Yes, madam," he replied, sternly, "I have

indeed learnt that by stratagem and fraud you have established a claim upon me; and that claim I have already recognised. You are the Hon. Mrs. Hardress."

There was a deep silence for a few minutes,—during which Hector had likewise taken a chair, on which he sat with a cold stern expression of countenance; and Cicely appeared not to be watching him, though she was really doing so with a furtive but earnest attention.

"I presume," Hector at length said, "that the story of the thirty thousand pounds is as much a fiction as the aunt at York? But of course it is! I am a fool to ask such a question."

"And what if I really possessed thirty thousand pounds?" said Cicely, now affecting to play with her kerchief, but in reality still fixing her eyes penetratingly upon Hector.

"Of what avail to put such a query?" he demanded, with a cold disdain, slightly broken by an accent and a gesture of impatience; "for I will know that you have nothing, and that you are dependent on the Timperleys for everything."

"Be not too sure of that which you assert," rejoined Cicely, in a tone which was sufficiently peculiar to make Hector start and survey her with attention.

"If you possess thirty thousand pounds," he said, "there would be something like a better excuse than any I can yet offer to the world for having"—he gulped at the word, and then added, "for having married you."

"Within four-and-twenty hours after my return to London," replied Cicely,—"I do not say *our* return, because I know not whether you accompany me—"

"Suppose that I do," interjected Hardress; "what then? Within four-and-twenty hours of our return—"

"I will produce to you the proofs," rejoined Cicely, "that I have thirty thousand pounds of my own—but every shilling of which, remember I will be settled on myself."

"Is this true, Cicely?" exclaimed Hector in astonishment.

"You know my character and my disposition," answered the young lady proudly; "judge thereby whether it is likely that I should descend to such a mean useless falsehood. You have found me playing a deep game and carrying out an intricate stratagem. But wherefore? Because you yourself had deceived me for a long time past: indeed, you had deceived me from the very beginning! Everything, therefore, was fair which I might do in order to compel you to render me an act of justice. Now I have succeeded; and I shall not think of deluding you with the idea that I possess a fortune in order to win for a couple or three days those attentions which would be more than ever withdrawn if the instant should come for me to confess to you that it was a deception."

"But how is it possible, Cicely—"

"No matter how it is possible," she interrupted him. "I tell you that within twenty-four hours after my arrival in London—"

"If I thought this," ejaculated Hector, starting up from his chair,—"if I thought that you really possessed such a fortune in your own right—why, I should care much less—and then too, it would

smooth down a thousand difficulties—my father and mother would be the more likely—And after all, Cicely, you are very genteel and good-looking—But thirty thousand pounds! I don't see how, unless old Timperley—"

"Never mind how it becomes mine!" interrupted Cicely. "I swear to you that if I fulfil not my word, I will leave England—I will flee away to another country—I will leave you unmolested—and you shall never hear of me again."

Hector was now convinced that Cicely was speaking the truth; and he exclaimed, "If you fulfil your words, it will mitigate much of the bitterness that I now feel!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CICELY'S DOWRY.—THE TRIAL.

It was on the second day after that of which we have just been writing, and a considerable sensation prevailed in the precincts of the Old Bailey; for this was the day fixed for the trial of Winifred Barrington.

We have before noticed how great was the excitement produced in the metropolis by all the details attending the foul crime of which she was accused; and though this excitement had sustained a lull during an interval of a month since the tragedy had taken place, it was now revived by the approaching judicial investigation. A true bill had been returned by the Grand Jury; and as the public could only judge of the case from the statements which had been published in the newspapers—and as nothing had transpired of what Winifred had privately communicated to Mr. Wardour, the barrister, after the examination at the police-court—the general impression was most unfavourable to the prisoner. Yet there was not a total absence of sympathy. It was known that she was young, of interesting appearance, and an orphan: it was known likewise that she had supported her aged grandfather in prison; nor less was it currently rumoured that there were some few individuals who entertained an idea of her innocence. Amongst these was Mrs. Slater, the worthy landlady of the house where Winifred had resided at the time of her arrest; and Mrs. Slater had lost not a single opportunity of proclaiming that idea to every one with whom she conversed on the subject. Not that she had any positive ground for making the assertion: it arose simply from her knowledge of Winifred's character and the faith which the good woman therefore had in her young friend.

And how had Winifred endured a month's imprisonment in Newgate? She had been very ill; and she remained the whole time in the Infirmary. She was several times visited by Mrs. Slater and Mr. Wardour: she received two or three kind messages from Miss Evelyn, sent through the medium of Rachel: but Agnes deemed it prudent not to visit the young seamstress in the prison, for the newspapers mentioned the names of those who sought her there, and this was a degree of publicity which Miss Evelyn naturally shrank from.

Yes—Winifred had been very ill in *one* gaol,

while her old grandfather was confined to his bed in the infirmary of *another*. As often as it was possible Mrs. Slater went to see the old man, to whom she bore the tenderest messages from his grand-daughter; and to Winifred did she carry back whatsoever affectionate sayings the old man himself had to send. But though still perfectly lucid in respect to his law affairs, Mr. Barrington seemed to have become comparatively childish when speaking of the terrible calamity that had overtaken Winifred. He vehemently protested his conviction of her innocence, though without seeming to have any definite idea of how she *could* be innocent, and at times he would passionately affirm that it was all a vile trick on the part of his enemies the Dalhams to crush him entirely.

Within two or three days of the trial, Winifred appeared suddenly to commence regaining her physical strength, as if it thus came back by an effort of her own will. It was the natural result of her mind gathering together the scattered remnants of its fortitude, as she felt the necessity of arming herself with all her courage for the approaching ordeal. Thus, when the memorable morning came, she almost felt as if she had not been ill at all; she dressed herself with neatness—she partook slightly of the meal that was served to her; and she assured the matron in the infirmary that she was thoroughly nerved for the occasion. But when the fatal moment arrived for Winifred to appear in the dock—when she was proceeding thither, and knew that she must almost immediately stand in the presence of the Judges, in the midst of a crowded court, the one object on whom all regards would be riveted—her courage seemed to fail, her knees bent under her, and she would have fallen, if the turnkey who was conducting her had not suddenly lent his arm to sustain her drooping form. The contact of that man, who in Winifred's eyes was the very personification of Newgate and all its associated horrors, suddenly startled her into the keenest sense of vitality again; and she continued her way. A few instants more, and she was in the dock!

The Judges had taken their seats—the barristers were assembled—the jury were being sworn—the court was crowded almost to suffocation. There was the buzzing, humming tone of subdued whispered discourse, as Winifred entered the dock: but the moment she made her appearance, a dead silence fell upon the assemblage, and all eyes were fixed upon her. Winifred strove to maintain her composure—or at least to support herself with a becoming fortitude: but she beheld nothing distinctly. There was in her mind the strong and painful knowledge that she was the focus for the regards of all present: she felt as it were that countless eyes were riveted upon her—but she distinguished them not. The tribunal seemed to swim round—to grow larger and larger—to be filled with forms which kept on dilating in proportion as the dimensions of the place itself thus extended—until she lost all idea of where the walls could be, and felt as if she were in the midst of a multitude stretching all around to the very horizon itself. But all in a moment she was awakened up from this species of feverish reverie by her elbow being nudged; and the turnkey whispered in her ear, "You must plead!"

Then suddenly—as if a new phase in the pano-



roma had presented itself with lightning rapidity—Winifred Barrington beheld everything with clearness. There were the Judges upon the bench—there the jury in the box—there, seated at the table, were the barristers, amongst whom was Mr. Wardour; and all around were the densely packed masses of spectators. The clerk of the court was asking Winifred whether she were guilty or not guilty?

"Not guilty," she replied, in a voice which was low but clear and distinctly audible, and the firmness of which astonished even herself.

Then the counsel for the prosecution rose to open the case. At that moment an individual, having the appearance of the "boots" or porter at a tavern, contrived to force his way through the crowd in the body of the court; and making towards the barristers' table, he touched the arm of an old gentleman who was standing just behind Mr. Wardour.

No. 20.—AGNES.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the man in a whisper: "but I believe you are Mr. Timperley?"

"Yea—that is my name," replied the well-known solicitor of Lincoln's Inn Fields. "What do you want?"

"I was charged, sir," answered the man, "to deliver this note into your hands."

"Ah!" said Mr. Timperley, at once recognising the handwriting; and he opened the billet. "I will come directly," he added, when he had glanced over the few lines which formed the contents of the note.

The hotel-porter—for such the man was—remained to have a good stare at Winifred Barrington; and having thus gratified his curiosity, he again worked his way through the crowd: but Mr. Timperley had preceded him, and was already issuing from the court. The lawyer hurried down the Old Bailey—passed into Ludgate Street—and

thence into Bridge Street, Blackfriars. Here he entered a large and well-known family hotel; and addressing himself to a waiter in the hall, he said, "I wish to see Mrs. Hardress."

"This way, if you please, sir!"—and the domestic conducted the attorney up the staircase to a handsomely furnished sitting-room on the first floor.

Cicely, who was alone in that room until Mr. Timperley thus made his appearance, started up from the sofa where she was seated; and hastening to greet the old man, she exclaimed, "My dear uncle, I am delighted to see you!"

"And I, my dear Cicely, am very glad to see you," responded the lawyer, as he shook her hand warmly. "Well, you have done something good for yourself: but you have lost me, I fear, an excellent client——"

"How so?" ejaculated Cicely in astonishment.

"Why, don't say a word to your husband Hector—for it is more or less a secret—but I have been engaged to some little extent for his father Lord Mendlesham, for many years past."

"His father cannot yet know of our marriage," observed Cicely.

"Well, but he must hear of it soon," rejoined Mr. Timperley; "and he will be sure to think that I have intrigued to bring this marriage about. But no matter, my dear girl! You are the Hon. Mrs. Hardress to all intents and purposes—and you will some day be Lady Mendlesham. You have brought honour into the family, my dear—I am proud of you. Your aunt will receive you with open arms—but when did you arrive from Scotland?"

"Late last night," answered Cicely,—"too late to call in Lincoln's Inn Fields?"

"And your husband Mr. Hardress?" said the lawyer; "I have not as yet had the pleasure of his acquaintance."

"I purposely suggested a variety of commissions for him to perform, and which will occupy him for an hour or so—because I wished to see you alone in the first instance. He has gone out."

"Ah, you sly puss, Cicely!" exclaimed the lawyer: "now at length it is all explained why you begged your aunt a little while back to let you have two or three hundred pounds. No wonder that you would not explain your object, but that you assured her the use of the money would be greatly beneficial to your interests! You were preparing this surprise for us; and I suppose that as Hector with his extravagancies is never very flush in a pecuniary sense, you had to bear all the expenses?"

"You have not guessed very widely of the mark, my dear uncle," answered Cicely, whom we must now call Mrs. Hardress.

"But how came you to know that I was in the court, waiting to hear the trial of that unhappy girl?" asked Mr. Timperley.

"Immediately after breakfast," replied Cicely, "I sent the hotel-porter to Lincoln's Inn Fields; but he returned with the intelligence that you had gone to the Old Bailey to hear the trial. So then I penned that note——"

"Ah! and you say in it," ejaculated Mr. Timperley, "that it is highly important you should see me without delay. Pray be quick with your ex-

planations, my dear Cicely," continued the lawyer; "for I am anxious to hear this trial. You are aware that the prisoner is the grand-daughter of my client Mr. Barrington, the poor old man who has been for so many years in a debtors' prison."

"I shall not detain you long," replied Cicely. "But how think you it will go with Winifred Barrington?"

"Ah! how can it go with her," exclaimed Mr. Timperley, shaking his head in an ominous manner, "in the face of all the evidence which is accumulated against her? But there is one very strange thing—I can't at all make it out——"

"And what is that?" inquired Mrs. Hardress quickly.

"Why, by some means or another a person has got upon the jury—an individual who can scarcely have any right to be there—and what it means I cannot understand."

"Do you suppose that he is prejudiced against Winifred Barrington, or that he is favourable to her?" asked Cicely.

"Well, there again I am puzzled," rejoined the lawyer. "He ought to be prejudiced—it is in the nature of things that he should be; and yet on the other hand, from certain information which I received about a month back——"

"Well," interrupted Cicely, "you are in a hurry to return to the court—and I likewise have plenty to do with my time; for I must hasten and pay my respects to my aunt in Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"To be sure!" said Mr. Timperley. "Now therefore for this business——"

"My dear uncle," interrupted Mrs. Hardress, "have the kindness to answer me a few questions. Your replies will constitute the best possible preface to the business which I have to introduce."

"Proceed, my dear girl," said the lawyer, who now began to think there was something peculiar in the tone and manner of his niece, as well as in the way in which she contemplated him.

"In the first place, my dear uncle," continued Cicely, "as you have not any relative of your own, I presume that you regard myself as your wife's nearest relative——"

"To be sure! I understand you!" exclaimed Mr. Timperley: "I regard you as my own nearest relative. Was not your father the brother of my dear wife——"

"Well then," continued Cicely, "regarding me as your nearest relative, you of course intend to make me your heiress?"

"My dear girl, what a question!" ejaculated the lawyer. "Do you know that it is highly improper——"

"I only know that I want an answer to my query," interrupted Mrs. Hardress. "But I will suppose it already given. Well then, I am to consider myself your heiress. Now, you are immensely rich—and it will not hurt you to put me in immediate possession of a portion of the ample fortune which you intend to leave me in your will."

Mr. Timperley started from his seat—angrily snatched up his hat—and said in a sharp quick manner, "If this is the important business, Mrs. Hardress, for which you have summoned me hither, I beg to decline discussing it with you. Indeed, I

am astonished—But no matter! Good morning."

"One word, if you please, my dear uncle," said Cicely in a quiet tone. "You know not how much the idea that is floating in my mind, regards your own best interests."

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded Mr. Timperley, stopping short as he was proceeding towards the door. "What *can* she mean?" he inwardly asked of himself; for as he turned his looks towards her, there was something in the expression of her countenance which again struck him as most peculiar.

"You are flattered, my dear uncle," said Cicely, "that I should have formed such a brilliant match—you will be able to boast of your niece, the Hon. Mrs. Hardress for the present—Lady Mendlesham hereafter—you are now allied as it were to a very aristocratic family—"

"And what of all this?" demanded the lawyer sharply.

"With such advantages accruing to yourself," responded Cicely, "you cannot possibly suffer me to be a dowless bride. In short, my dear uncle, I have taken it upon myself to promise Hector that my dowry shall amount to thirty thousand pounds."

"Cicely, you are mad!" exclaimed the lawyer: and he actually for the moment fancied that his niece was taking leave of her senses.

"I never was more sane in my life," she rejoined, with an amiable smile, but with a look which implied confidence in the part which she was performing. "Thirty thousand pounds—"

"Ridiculous, Cicely!" cried the lawyer, with a gesture of impatience. "Do you think that I am going to give my hard-earned wealth to be dissipated by the extravagancies of your patrician husband?"

"It is only a negotiation which I am opening," answered Cicely: then taking a paper from her bosom, she said, "In this letter, my dear uncle, worth thirty thousand pounds?"

Mr. Timperley, at the sight of that document, started as if bitten by a serpent: most hideously ghastly became his countenance; and it was a strange hollow gaze of dismay and consternation which he fixed upon his niece. Her looks were now no longer unintelligible to him: he comprehended the meaning of that calm confidence—that tranquil assurance, which her manner had throughout been displaying.

"You see, uncle, that I know *everything*," she said impressively: "but without another syllable of discussion let us bring this matter to an issue. Write me a cheque for thirty thousand pounds—or give me your undertaking that that amount shall be forthcoming in the course of to-morrow—and this letter is yours, to be burnt in that fire."

It would be impossible to describe the strange horrified gaze which Mr. Timperley fixed upon Cicely, as she still displayed the letter, but at the same time taking care to hold it in such a manner that it could not be suddenly snatched out of her hand. Her own looks now denoted an implacable determination, though there was nothing overbearing in them.

"How came you by that letter?" asked Mr. Timperley, in a low hollow voice.

"I cannot tell you," answered Cicely. "Suffice it for you to know that if it be destroyed in yonder fire"—and she pointed to the grate—"no living soul but myself and you could proclaim what its contents were."

"Is it so, Cicely?" ejaculated the lawyer, putting the question with tremulous earnestness: "are you telling me the truth? But your husband—"

"Think you I would have entrusted him with such a secret?" cried Mrs. Hardress disdainfully. "Do you suppose that Hector accompanied me willingly into Scotland for the purpose of recognising me as his wife? No, no!—your own good sense tells you that there was an under-current of circumstances—perhaps coercion—perhaps stratagem—on my part. And that something of this sort has actually occurred, you can only too well surmise from the fact of my having obtained a sum of money from my aunt a little while back, wherewith to carry on my proceedings. You see, therefore, that I am no ordinary person—that I possess energy, perseverance, and prudence. I had my fortunes to make—and I am making it. I have entrusted to my husband no secret which could in any way give him a power over myself or any one connected with me."

"I never till now, Cicely, comprehended your real character," answered the lawyer; "though I have flattered myself that none was more skilful than I in reading the human heart. But this sum which you demand—"

"I dare not take a shilling less," interjected Cicely; "for I have promised Hector that my dowry shall be thirty thousand pounds."

"Consider, my dear girl," said Mr. Timperley, now adopting a cajoling tone and look, "the sum is immense! You would not play the part of intimidation and coercion towards your uncle! Have I not given you a home?—has not your aunt advanced you money on the mere faith of your assurance that it was for your benefit?"

"And am not I doing you an immense service," exclaimed Cicely, "by putting in your possession this document?"

"True, true, my dear girl!" ejaculated the lawyer: "I do indeed recognise the extent of this service. And never to your husband—and never to your aunt—"

"Do you think I would breathe a syllable concerning *this*?" ejaculated Cicely, as she held the letter before the lawyer's eyes. "Understand me well!—or if you understand your own character, you can all the more easily comprehend mine. I am intensely selfish—I am a hypocrite and a dissembler, as well as an astute strategist. My heart was once a good one—but it is changed. I have now no heart for any one but myself. All my sympathies are concentrated in my own egotism. To achieve my own aggrandisement I would trample upon every other consideration: I would scruple at no crime, so long as I had the certainty of shielding myself from its consequences. My affection for you is just as much as your's is for me. The same in respect to my aunt! I owe neither of you anything; for you were both selfish in offering me an asylum at your house; and I was selfish in accepting it. You knew that I was what the world calls a fine young woman, and that I should embellish your drawing-

room when you received guests—that I should be an attraction, in short. You likewise fancied that I should form some alliance which would reflect honour, credit, and respectability on yourself and your wife. Now you see, uncle, that I comprehend you both thoroughly;—and you comprehend me.”

Mr. Timperley listened in astonishment, not altogether unmingled with admiration and satisfaction, at this voluntary self-unveiling of his niece. The bold hardihood with which she proclaimed her real character excited his admiration—and all the more so, because it was a character which in its unprincipled and unscrupulous qualities was perfectly akin to his own. His satisfaction too was excited, because he saw at a glance that with such a character the secret connected with that letter was altogether safe, provided he yielded to her pecuniary demand. She had thrown aside the mask from her countenance; and he was now enabled to look her in the face—to encounter her gaze, as one bad person may without being abashed meet the regards of another.

“Yes, there is now a mutual understanding,” he said; “and you shall have the dower which you require. I will give you an undertaking—”

“Write it at once,” interjected Cicely; “and order your clerks in the course of the day to draw up a deed which shall settle the whole amount upon myself.”

“Ah, you are wise, Cicely—you are wise!” said the lawyer, as he sat down at a table where there were writing materials in readiness.

Mr. Timperley then proceeded to pen the undertaking which he had agreed to give; and when it was concluded, Cicely read it with attention.

“That will do,” she said, taking the paper from the table—for she had bent over her uncle’s shoulder to read it: and she now handed him the letter which had possessed the talismanic power of eliciting the large amount constituting her dowry.

Mr. Timperley took that letter, his countenances becoming animated with a strange sinister satisfaction; and hastening to the fireplace, he tossed it into the grate. He waited until he perceived that it was reduced to tinder; and he then stirred the fire so that there should be no possibility of a fragment of that letter remaining to afford the slightest clue to the secret which its contents might have revealed.

“Now, Cicely,” he said, again turning towards his niece, “you will tell me, my dear girl, how that document fell into your hands?”

“Not now, at all events,” replied Cicely: “on some future occasion perhaps. But speed you back to the court, or whithersoever else your business may take you; for I know that your time is precious.”

“And I may rely upon you, Cicely?” said the lawyer, fixing his earnest gaze upon her.

“You know that you can,” she responded significantly, “for more reasons than one.”

“True!—for more reasons than one!” repeated Mr. Timperley: and taking up his hat, he issued from the apartment.

We must now return to the tribunal of justice in the Old Bailey, and see what has been taking place during Mr. Timperley’s absence.

It will be remembered that Winifred was suddenly startled from a dream-like illusion of the

senses, by being called upon to plead guilty or not guilty, and that she had given her reply firmly in the latter sense. Now all objects in the court were plainly visible to her, and were no longer seen through the phantasmagorian medium of a painfully self-deluding imagination. The indictment was read—the counsel for the prosecution was opening the case. For some minutes Winifred kept her eyes bent downward, as if she could thereby shut herself out from becoming the focus for all the regards of that crowded court. At length the recollection began slowly to dawn in unto her mind that her life hung to a thread, which twelve men, seated in an adjacent box, could with their verdict either snap in a moment or strengthen to the consistency of the stoutest cord. She was impelled by a species of fearful curiosity to study the countenances of those men who were thus the arbiters of her destiny. She looked towards them, furtively and timidly at first—then more attentively. Her eyes settled upon the foreman. He was an elderly man, with a great hook nose, on the middle of the bridge of which rested a pair of huge silver spectacles. There was something very grave if not stern in the expression of his countenance; and Winifred experienced a sensation of heart-sinking as she thought to herself that there was little chance of such a man being awayed otherwise than by the details of the evidence; and alas! she knew that this evidence weighed most strongly against her. As her eyes slowly wandered over the other jurors, she suddenly gave a slight start; for there was a countenance amongst them which instantaneously struck her as being familiar. She looked again, with wonder and perplexity in her mind. Yes—assuredly it must be he! She passed her hand athwart her eyes, for fear lest she were the victim of some strange unaccountable optical delusion; and then she looked again. It was no delusion: for how could she possibly fail to recognise that pale countenance, shaded by dark hair, and with its black whiskers—that aquiline profile—that well-shaped mouth—those dark piercing eyes? Yes, it was he!—that gentleman of about forty years of age, of moderate stature, and of thin figure—the very same indeed whom Winifred had met at the gate of Sidney Villa and had followed into the bye-lane on that memorable afternoon when the murder was committed for which she now stood arraigned before a tribunal!

On that day to which we are referring, the gentleman was very handsomely dressed; but now he was apparelled with exceeding plainness, in the style of a respectable tradesman. He wore a simple suit of black—with no jewellery displayed, except a watch-chain of moderate price. The jurors sat in two rows in the box: he was in the back row, and quite in a corner. He appeared not to be taking the slightest notice of Winifred: his eyes were fixed upon the barrister who was detailing the case for the prosecution. There was now no longer a doubt in Winifred’s mind that in this particular juror she beheld the gentleman who was so well known to her, and through whose assistance she had obtained the services of Mr. Wardour. That pale-faced gentleman had never visited her during her month’s imprisonment: but he had not forgotten her! No—he was there, in the jury-box!

But why had he obtained admission thither? why did he constitute himself one of the ominous *twelve* on whom her fate depended? Winifred knew that it could not possibly be to ensure her condemnation: she was equally well convinced that his purpose was to befriend her. She experienced a sensation as if her heart were rising up into her throat with the hopeful emotions that were now excited within her;—and as she glanced towards the barristers' table, she encountered the looks of Mr. Wardour. He saw that she had only just perceived the friend who had by some means obtained admission to the jury-box: he comprehended what was passing in her mind; and having flung upon her that significant look, he again turned his eyes towards the counsel for the prosecution. But Winifred felt no longer as if she were utterly friendless in the midst of the tribunal; and her soul was fortified.

The counsel for the prosecution finished his address; and the witnesses were now summoned in due order. The first witnesses were the two police-constables who had given their evidence before the magistrate as already detailed in a previous chapter. One of them, in deposing to the circumstances of the arrest at Mrs. Slater's house, identified the ring which he found upon the table in Winifred's room; and he repeated the words which in her excitement she had uttered on the occasion—"You know not what it has cost me to obtain it!"

Charles De Vere was now called into the witness-box. He stated that he was a clerk in the Home Office at the time when the murder occurred, but that he had since obtained the appointment of junior paid *attaché* to the British Embassy at the Court of Naples. With the same clearness and precision that he had displayed before the magistrate a month back—and with the same unmistakable air of one who only came forward in the discharge of a melancholy duty—our young hero gave his evidence. When speaking of all he had seen pass betwixt the prisoner and Mrs. Chicklade in the bye-lane, Charles repeated those words which had burst from Winifred's lips on the occasion:—"There is the feeling of a tigress within me!"—and although this fact was well known before, it nevertheless produced a powerful sensation amidst the audience.

The next witness was Mr. Meadowbank, the surgeon, who gave evidence precisely similar to that which he had adduced when before the magistrate. Then came Mrs. Slater; and this worthy woman interspersed her answers to the questions put to her, with vehemently uttered eulogies upon Winifred's character. The omnibus conductor and Miss Evelyn's housekeeper, Rachel, were summoned to repeat the depositions they had made before the magistrate; and the case for the prosecution was closed.

In the meanwhile Mr. Timperley had returned into the court; and having worked his way through the crowd, he had resumed his stand in the immediate vicinity of Mr. Wardour's place. Be it understood that Mr. Timperley was not the solicitor for the defence: other lawyers had been engaged to conduct it and to draw up the briefs for Mr. Wardour:—but it was considered by those present to whom Mr. Timperley was known, that it was only natural he should experience a lively

interest and curiosity on behalf of the granddaughter of his client Mr. Barrington.

The case for the prosecution being closed, Mr. Wardour had now to rise to enter upon his defence on behalf of the prisoner. Just at the very moment that he was thus rising, the learned gentleman flung a rapid glance upon Winifred. It was one of those looks which are without significance to the common observer, but which are full of meaning with those between whom a secret rests. Though so short and transient, there was indeed for Winifred a world of meaning in that look. It was full of the most earnest appeal and almost plaintive entreaty on the part of that most excellent man, that he might be allowed to take his own course and embody in his defence whatsoever had been communicated to him privately by Winifred. But the young girl simply shook her head, while her features assumed an expression of mournfullest resignation, blended with the firmness of a heroine. Mr. Wardour heaved a profound sigh, which he however concealed under that slight cough with which a public orator is wont to collect the powers of his voice ere entering upon his speech. The profoundest silence now reigned throughout the court; and Mr. Wardour began his address to the jury.

In a prologue, couched in the most pathetic language, Mr. Wardour gave a sketch of the Barrington family, showing how the poor old grandfather had been a prisoner for five-and-twenty years in Whitecross Street, and how he was the plaintiff in one of those interminable Chancery suits which have proved the scandal and disgrace of British law and justice. He described how Winifred had lost her father when only eight years of age—how at fifteen she had lost her mother—and how for about a twelvemonth afterwards she had lived with a widowed aunt, until that relation was likewise summoned away from this world by the cold hand of death.

"And now," continued Mr. Wardour, "commenced the most serious trials which the unfortunate prisoner at the bar had known down to the date of which I am speaking. Alone as it were in the world—having just attended the remains of a fond relative to the grave—having parted from a cousin of about her own age, whom the misfortunes which struck this doomed family blow upon blow, had sent to sea—Winifred Barrington, at the age of sixteen, as I tell you, was left alone in the world. But there is even something worse than mere loneliness: it is when the position of the struggling individual is hampered by the wants and necessities of another who has to be fostered and cared for. Such was Winifred's position: for she had not merely to think of herself—she had to think of her grandsire likewise. A protector he could not be to her; for all his energies and powers were circumscribed to his prison-house—and beyond the walls thereof his supervision in respect to this young girl could not range. And how do we find Winifred Barrington behaving? Did she abandon herself to despair? did she succumb to temptation? No!—she encountered her destiny with the courage of a heroine; and she began to toil arduously for her bread. Yes—she toiled not to support herself alone, but to minister to the comforts of her aged, helpless, captive grandsire. You have heard from the lips of that highly re-

spectable woman, Mrs. Slater, how for two years Winifred Barrington resided in her house with an unimpeachable character. You have heard from those same lips how this poor toiling girl herself lived sparingly, that she might convey little luxuries with a fond devotion to the old man in his captivity. You have unimpeachable testimony to the amiability of disposition, the kindness of heart, and the unwearied benevolence of the prisoner in the dock; and yet you are asked by the counsel for the prosecution to find her guilty of a most barbarous and savage deed of assassination! No, gentlemen of the jury! such a verdict will never be returned by you; because it would be utterly incompatible with the incontrovertible idea that she is by nature amiable, meek, generous, and benevolent!"

For some little while longer did the learned gentleman continue in this strain, so that there was many a humid eye in court; and Winifred herself was weeping softly but plentifully.

"It would be impossible to disguise the fact," continued Mr. Wardour, "that there was some sort of acquaintanceship between the prisoner in the dock and the deceased Mrs. Chicklade. Nor will I attempt to blink the circumstance that Mrs. Chicklade was a woman of an abandoned character. They are seen in altercation together in a secluded spot: but who can tell what was the subject of that altercation? Mr. De Vere, the only witness whose evidence touches upon the point at all, can throw no light upon that portion of the subject. But the young girl was heard to exclaim passionately '*that there was the spirit of the tigress within her.*' The woman was therefore evidently provoking her; and if you suppose that in a moment when goaded to madness, the young girl acted in accordance with the impulse of such feelings, you will rather be inclined to adopt the merciful alternative and to pronounce a verdict of *manslaughter* instead of a verdict of *murder*. Then there is the affair of the ring. I will at once admit that the ring was at first on the finger of Mrs. Chicklade, and that it was subsequently discovered in the prisoner's possession. But what if this very ring was the object of the altercation?—what if the young girl, beholding it on Mrs. Chicklade's finger, recognised in it an object of interest which once had belonged to herself, but which had been lost?—and what if she gave to Mrs. Chicklade for the restoration of that ring, the hard-earned gains of an entire week—the produce of six days' toil? If this were the fact, would it not account for the excited words which she had addressed to the police-constable—'*You know not what it has cost me to obtain it!*' Can you for a moment suppose that this young girl, so steady in her habits, so honourable in her dealings—with all parsimony, and with no extravagance—committed a murder to obtain possession of that ring? Mrs. Chicklade had other jewellery at the time about her person; and this was not touched. Her purse was in her pocket—it had money in it: that likewise was untouched! If a murder had been committed for the sake of plunder, why was the greater portion of the tempting booty left behind? Again, too, the young girl sought not to conceal the ring, nor made away with it the instant it came into her possession. The officers of justice who proceeded

to take her into custody, found it lying on the table in her apartment. She did not snatch it up, with a guilty consciousness of the significance of its presence, the moment the officers made their appearance. On the contrary, gentlemen of the jury—I think it is fair to infer from the evidence of the constables that she was ignorant of the object of their visit to her lodgings until they themselves explained it. Indeed, I utterly deny that my unfortunate client had any hand in the death of the deceased Mrs. Chicklade. It was a bye lane where she met her death—a very lonely lane, where perhaps not more than fifty persons might pass individually and at different times in the course of a day. It was a spot as favourable as can be well conceived for a deed of assassination to be perpetrated by some one entering that lane a very short time after Winifred Barrington had issued from it. Now let us look at the evidence of the surgeon. He tells you that same thing which he first said before the magistrate,—that he should be very sorry to affirm that the small delicate fingers of the prisoner were the same which clutched the neck of the deceased woman."

"At the same time, Mr. Wardour," interposed the Judge, consulting his note-book, "Mr. Meadowbank the surgeon has added that as an honest man he is compelled to admit that those marks might have been made by the prisoner's fingers."

"True, my lord," continued the learned counsel: "but still there is a perceptible doubt floating in Mr. Meadowbank's evidence on this point; and I claim for my client the benefit of that doubt. I say therefore, gentlemen of the jury, that the marks which were visible upon the person of the deceased woman were made by hands far more powerful as well as larger than those of the prisoner. I insist upon this point; for the hands of my client are singularly small and delicate; whereas those marks—for I saw them myself—were produced by fingers of larger dimensions and capable of more energetic pressure."

Mr. Wardour continued his able defence for a considerable time longer. He was listened to with an almost breathless attention by every one present; and several times during his oration, Winifred, amidst her weeping, thought within herself, "O heaven, what power hast thou bestowed upon the language of this man!"

At length he sat down, much exhausted: but he rose again almost immediately, to examine several witnesses to speak to the character of Winifred. These consisted of the governor and several turnkeys of Whitecross-Street Prison. They all testified to the invariable propriety of Winifred's conduct when visiting the gaol; and they spoke feelingly of her behaviour towards her aged grand-sire.

The case for the defence being closed, the counsel for the prosecution made a brief reply. He insisted that Mr. Wardour's explanation in reference to the ring was unsatisfactory. It was no reason, he argued, that because Winifred had merely the ring in her possession, she had not committed the crime imputed to her; because she might have been startled and impelled to sudden flight by some real sound or vague terror before she had time to complete the work of plunder.

"But I admit," said the counsel for the prosecution,

cution, "that I do not think the foul deed was perpetrated expressly for the sake of plunder. All the evidence seems to indicate that the crime was the result of a quarrel; and therefore the plunder was probably an afterthought. As for the marks of the fingers on the person of the deceased, it is well known that these will by the process of swelling and discolouration, undergo a change, so that what was at first a mark comparatively delicate, may grow and expand into a larger one."

The learned Judge now began to sum up; and his review of the whole case was most lucid and impartial. He said that there was a feeling in his mind that something had been kept back on the part of the defence—that either the prisoner had refrained from being explicit, and therefore her counsel's instructions were imperfect; or that the counsel had his own reasons as a lawyer for involving in ambiguity and mystery the whole particulars of the interview between the prisoner and Mrs. Chickadee in the bye-lane. Then in reference to Mr. Wardour's observations upon the alternatives of a verdict for manslaughter or murder, the Judge plainly told the jury that they must not be guided by those suggestions. Their verdict must either be an *acquittal* or *wilful murder*. Suppose that the prisoner, argued the Judge, had rushed out of the lane and had cried to the first person she met that she had accidentally slain a woman in a quarrel, the affair would have worn a different complexion. But if she really were the cause of the woman's death, she had sought to conceal the crime: she had fled stealthily away. The jury had likewise to bear in mind the fact that after the prisoner had passionately declared that *the spirit of the tigress was aroused within her*, she had time to grow cool and compose herself during the few minutes that Mr. De Vere was on the spot, generously offering her protection to the young girl. Thus, having refused that protection, and preferring to remain upon the spot, it could only have been for the purpose of renewing the altercation; and if the death of her opponent were the consequence, it must be held under such circumstances to be wilful murder. At the same time the Judge begged the jury to weigh all the other arguments so powerfully adduced by Mr. Wardour; and if the slightest doubt remained upon their minds, they were to give the prisoner the benefit of that doubt by a verdict of acquittal.

It was now four o'clock in the afternoon; and the case was left in the hands of the jury. Mr. Wardour's speech had produced a considerable effect for the time-being on a large portion of the audience, whose opinion accordingly turned in favour of Winifred. But that effect was soon impaired by the reply of the counsel for the prosecution; and it was further diminished by the summing-up of the Judge. Indeed, the general impression now was that in the face of the evidence the jury could come to no other conclusion than that Winifred was guilty. Such was visibly the sentiment of the Judge and of the greater portion of the Bar; for instead of retiring as if it were a doubtful case in which the jury might be supposed to require leisure for deliberation, they remained in their respective seats.

Meanwhile the jurors had grouped themselves together; and it seemed as if they would actually

come to a verdict without leaving the box. But it was not so; for they speedily retired for the purpose of private discussion. Time wore on; and Winifred now sat in the dock, a prey to the acutest suspense. An hour passed:—it was five o'clock. The Judge now directed the jury to be sent for; and he inquired whether they had any chance of coming to a speedy verdict?

"I scarcely know, my lord," replied the foreman. "Eleven of us are agreed to the verdict which we feel it our duty to return: but the twelfth is of an opposite opinion."

"I will wait half-an-hour," said the Judge; "and as there is only one dissentient, I dare say you will have agreed by that time."

The jurors bowed, and again withdrew. Another half-hour of most torturing suspense for Winifred, as she sat in the dock, her face buried in her hands! She could full well conjecture who the *one* was that held out in opposition to his colleague; and the conviction was therefore shudderingly forced upon her mind that eleven of the jurors were prepared to doom her to the scaffold. Oh! could that one continue to hold out in the face of all the testimony which had convinced the eleven others?

The half-hour passed—the court was still crowded—no one had quitted his place, with the exception of the jury, who were now re-entering their box.

"Gentlemen, are you agreed?" inquired the clerk of the court.

"We are not, sir," answered the foreman; "and there seems to be no chance of any such agreement. There is only one who holds out—the same as at first."

"Perhaps it is some point of law," said the Judge, "which the gentleman may wish to have explained to him?"

"No, my lord," replied the foreman of the jury; "it is nothing of that sort: his dissent is upon the whole case."

"Then, gentlemen, I am sorry for you," rejoined the Judge; "but you must be looked up; and I will come down to the court again at eight o'clock to receive your verdict."

The jurors accordingly withdrew once more; the Judge quitted the bench, and departed in his carriage to his own home to dinner. Most of the barristers likewise departed; and Winifred was conducted back into the prison. The audience remained almost to a man at their posts.

Two hours and a half elapsed: the clocks of the City churches were striking eight, when the Judge, who had come back to the court, resumed his seat upon the bench. The jurors were now again summoned back to their box; and Winifred was once more placed in the dock. A dead silence prevailed: breathless was the suspense. And Mr. Timperley, now seated at the barristers' table, was still in the court,—as was likewise Mr. Wardour.

"Gentlemen of the jury," inquired the clerk, "are you agreed?"

"Unfortunately," answered the foreman, looking very gloomy and very hungry, "we appear to be farther off from an agreement than ever. We are now seven one way and five the other. The first dissentient has succeeded in bringing four others round to his opinion."

"Then, in this case," said the Judge, "you must be locked up again. I have no objection to wait an hour: but if at nine o'clock you are not agreed, you will be locked up for the night."

The jurors again retired; and the Judge sat upon the bench, alternately reading the evening paper and conversing with the Lord Mayor. Winifred was kept in the dock: the number of the audience remained undiminished.

"He has brought four round to his own view!" Winifred kept repeating to herself. "Oh, how he must have striven for me!"

The hour passed—and the jury were again summoned. In reply to the usual question put by the clerk of the court, the foreman said, "There are now seven on the side where at first there was only one: there are consequently five in favour of the verdict originally proposed. But there is not the slightest chance of an agreement."

"I don't know," said the Judge. "If only the one had continued to hold out, I should deem it my duty to discharge you: but inasmuch as he has brought six others to his own opinion, I am bound to leave the matter to the continued influences of discussion."

"Would it be too much to ask your lordship to wait another hour?" inquired the foreman, hesitatingly.

"I will wait another hour," responded the Judge.

That hour elapsed: then another ten minutes was begged; and finally, at a quarter past ten o'clock—when Judge, barristers, audience, and prisoner were well-nigh exhausted—the jury returned for the last time into their box.

"Gentlemen, are you agreed?" inquired the clerk of the court.

"We are, sir," was the foreman's response.

"How say you, gentlemen?" demanded the clerk. "Guilty or Not Guilty?"

"Not Guilty," rejoined the foreman.

A faint cry escaped from Winifred's lips; and she was borne senseless from the dock.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BANK OF THE STREAMLET.

THE scene of our story again shifts to that West Indian isle where the destinies of Gustavus Barrington had cast him. It was three or four days after the loss of the box containing the ore and gold dust,—that loss which had suddenly reduced him from wealth and independence to comparative poverty or dependence once more,—when the following scene took place.

At a very early hour in the morning—much earlier than she was accustomed to issue from the villa—Emily Pinnoch walked forth. She was attired in the simplest *negligée*—a mere wrapper thrown around her form,—the pliant and almost gauzy folds of the muslin displaying the exquisite symmetry of her shape, and following as it were the very movements of her beauty with a grace which only the sentiment of an anchorite could dissassociate from voluptuousness. She wore no corset—there was no artificial means of compression to give additional slenderness to the waist or a more effec-

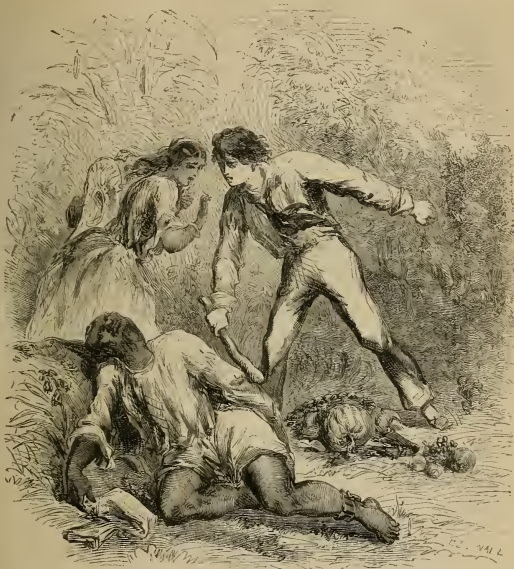
tive development to her richly-modelled contours. The symmetry was of such statue-like perfection that it would only have been impaired by such unnatural artifice; and as she walked in freedom, every movement was characterized by an elegant elasticity. Although at so early an hour in the morning, the heat was already oppressive; and thus the lightness of Emily's vesture was a comfort as well as a becoming mode of setting off her dusky loveliness. Nothing could be finer than the polish of her skin, looking like tinted alabaster, so smooth and even, and conveying an idea of the firmness of the flesh itself, yet also associated with the impression of velvet softness. It was as if the most perfect statue which ever emanated from the chisel of an ancient sculptor, had become animated with the Promethean fire of life—and as if having hurriedly cast light draperies around itself, was wandering with all the unstudied graces of natural movement and gesture.

A large straw hat protected the quadron girl's countenance from the burning rays of the sun; and a basket was slung to her arm. But her mood was pensive: her eyes were bent down as she walked slowly through the garden attached to the villa of Mount Pleasant. With that thoughtful air the long ebony fringes of the eyelids half-curtained the luminous orbs themselves: the rich red lips were slightly apart, affording a glimpse of the anowy teeth, like closely set kernels in a cleft of moist red fruitage. She was reflecting profoundly—painfully and sorrowfully; and ever and anon as she proceeded, a deep sigh made the half-revealed bosom heave, swell, and then sink again.

Through the garden she bent her steps, until she reached the bank of a little crystal streamlet; and here she paused. On this spot bloomed the loveliest flowers and flourished the choicest fruits of the garden. It was Emily's custom to cull the sweetest of these flowers and pluck the most luscious of those fruits for the decoration of the breakfast-table; and she had been wont to take a pleasure in the proceeding—especially since Gustavus was an inmate of the villa. But for the last day or two, and particularly on this morning of which we are writing, the beautiful quadron ceased to experience that pleasure: for she now scarcely took pleasure in anything, for reasons that will presently be explained. Nevertheless, she still adhered to her custom: but it was in a mechanical sort of manner, without pausing for the purpose of selection, that she culled flowers and gathered fruits on the bank of the streamlet. Her basket was soon full; and then she sat down close by the purling brook, abstractedly gazing on its gently flowing tide and giving way to her reflections once more.

Presently, in the same mechanical way in which she had plucked the fruits and flowers, Emily drew off her slippers and her hose; and she bathed her feet in the streamlet. The clear waters gurgled around her exquisitely shaped limbs which were thus consigned to their refreshing coolness; and those waters almost seemed to play with them with the consciousness of a sentiment. For several minutes did the beautiful quadron continue seated thus; until she was suddenly startled by hearing some one advancing amongst the trees; and looking round, she beheld Gustavus.

He too had come forth to walk at that early



morning hour; and on account of the oppressive heat, he too was lightly clad. He knew not he should meet Emily Pincock there: he was ignorant indeed that she had quitted the house. He could not keep the couch on which he had lain tossing feverishly under the influence of his painful thoughts; and he had therefore roamed forth in one of those moods in which a man's afflicted mind fancies that there may be a more congenial solitude amongst trees and shrubs in the open air than within the four walls of his own chamber.

Emily Pincock, on catching a glimpse of the advancing form of Gustavus, hastily drew forth her limbs from the water, and sprang up to her feet. She likewise snatched up her basket: but she forgot her hose and her slippers—she recollected not that her feet were naked—she was full of confusion and agitation.

"Good morning, Emily," said the young man, No. 21.—AGNES.

whose air was preoccupied and whose looks were careworn. "You are out batimesa?"

"And you too, Gustavus," she replied, in a voice of the most plaintive mournfulness.

"Oh, it is different with me!" he ejaculated. "I cannot rest! Sleep does not visit my eyes—I toss about upon a feverish couch—and it is a relief when the earliest hour comes at which I can leave it."

"Yee—you are indeed altered, my dear Gustavus," said Emily, fixing her large dark eyes with indescribable tenderness upon him—a tenderness in which there was also a certain blending of compassion. "So altered indeed are you," she added, in a lower cadence of her sweet liquid voice, "that I almost fear you have ceased to love me!"

"How often have you told me this within the last two or three days?" ejaculated young Bar-

rington with a slight gesture of impatience. "Do you think I can be happy and contented with my present lot?"

"If that fortune had never been placed in your hands, Gustavus," answered Emily, in a mild deprecating manner, "would you not have been happy and contented with your lot? You were happy when you were first here——"

"Ah! because I had never even formed so wild a hope as that I should become the possessor of a fortune!" exclaimed Gustavus: "I could not possibly foresee that heaven would place in my hands the means of bearing happiness across the wide Atlantic to those who are dear to me in my own native clime! But all of a sudden I was enriched—and then as suddenly my riches were snatched away from me. It is this that maddens me!"

"Perhaps, Gustavus, your treasure will yet be recovered," said the quadroneer flatteringly, as her eyes were bent down upon the contents of her basket, while her beautifully formed fingers played nervously with the fruits and flowers.

"What chance is there of it?" ejaculated Gustavus, again speaking with impatience. "That hideous negro on whom our suspicions settled, resolutely denied the robbery; and candidly must I confess that there was an air of honest sincerity about him when he was taxed with the burglarious theft."

"You do not know these blacks so well as I, Gustavus," observed Emily: "they are full of deception and hypocrisy, as my uncle himself has likewise told you. Remember that Nelson could not prove that he was in his hut upon Mr. Thurlow's estate throughout that entire night——"

"How could he prove it, since he lives alone?" demanded Gustavus. "On the other hand, be it borne in mind that for the same reason no one could prove he was absent. In short, Emily, it is useless to discuss the matter—my treasure is gone, irrecoverably and mysteriously—and you are wrong to attempt to buoy me up with the hope that I shall ever get it back."

"Oh, Gustavus! how harshly you are speaking to me!" murmured the quadroneer, the tears trickling from her eyes and falling like diamond-drops of rain upon the fruits and flowers in her basket. "You seem in your accents to reproach me for the calamity which has overtaken you."

There was indeed something more than harshness—there was even a species of brutality in the abrupt, impatient, cutting manner in which the youth spoke. Yet he dearly loved Emily. But it is one of the idiosyncracies of human nature—one of the worst and most morbid peculiarities of the human mind—to visit first of all the bitterness of the heart's affliction upon the object of that heart's love. Yet let us not be mistaken; for we do not include the gentler sex in what may seem to be a wholesale accusation. For woman never displays this evil feeling: it is only man who does it. And at times the best of men will thus act. Gustavus Barrington possessed a disposition as good, a heart as generous, a soul as magnanimous as any being of his sex;—but still he was not exempt from that weakness to which we have alluded!

Yes—he had spoken harshly and even brutally to the quadroneer girl: but the gentle reproach which she had uttered, suddenly made him aware

of the unkindness of his conduct. His heart was touched—his thoughts were called back from their painful abstraction—and he gazed upon her with attention and with deepening interest. He saw that she was weeping: he beheld how beautiful she looked: his eyes wandered over her entire form; and now, for the first time during the present interview he observed that her feet were naked. Her slippers and her hose upon the bank of the streamlet showed what she had been doing: his presence had evidently startled her from the midst of bathing her limbs; and there he had kept her standing with her naked feet upon the hot parched ground. This circumstance, though really so trivial in itself, appeared to the youth to enhance the unkindness of his treatment of the beautiful quadroneer girl; and suddenly folding her in his arms, he passionately exclaimed, "Forgive me, Emily! My conduct has been most cruel towards you."

Down fell the basket of fruit and flowers, as with a cry of joy the quadroneer felt herself strained to her lover's breast. There she nestled, weeping and sobbing in the very plenitude of her ecstatic feelings; for she found that she was loved once more.

"Oh, my sweet Emily!" continued Gustavus, as he now proceeded to restore to the basket the fruits and flowers which had fallen from it, "I have been half mad—I have scarcely known what I was doing! I have been uncourteous towards your excellent uncle and unkind towards yourself! But now it is all over. Perish the recollection of the fortune which I have lost! Insensate that I have been to suffer the incident thus to prey upon my mind, when the possession of your love ought to have sufficed for my happiness!"

"Oh, now you speak like yourself again, dearest, dearest Gustavus!" cried the quadroneer, with a gushing exultation of feeling, as her luminous black eyes bent a fond adoring glance upon her lover: then selecting the most beautiful flower from the basket which he had restored to her, she said in a lower tone, and with a timid bashfulness of manner, "Accept this from my hand, Gustavus, as a proof that you harbour no sentiment but that of love for me."

"Oh, none, none, Emily!" cried the youth enthusiastically, as he took the flower; and having kissed it, he placed it beneath his vesture next to his heart.

"I will join you in a minute, Gustavus," said the beautiful quadroneer: "and we will return to the villa together."

She glided towards the bank; and Gustavus walked aside for a few moments while she resumed her hose and slippers. Concealed amidst the trees throughout the scene which we have been describing, was Mr. Hargrave the misanthrope. He had heard everything—he had beheld everything; but he himself was unseen by the lovers—his presence there was unsuspected by them. He now slowly and cautiously retreated; and almost immediately afterwards Emily Pinnock rejoined Gustavus.

"I feel, my beloved," said the youth, passing his arm round her waist as they walked slowly along together, "that my conduct has been most ungenerous and most unkind towards you. But Oh! the possession of that treasure had inspired

me with the hope of doing so much good in England and infusing such happiness into the hearts of my aged grandsire and my cousin Winifred! Now that hope is destroyed—and I will endeavour to bestir from my mind the fact that it ever existed. My voyage to England is abandoned—it would be purposeless now—and I remain here, to think only of love and my adored Emily!”

A thrill of exultation and happiness swept like a galvanic shock through the entire form of the beautiful quadroom; and of her own accord she upturned her countenance towards that of Gustavus that he might imprint a caress upon her lips. Joy was dancing in her luminous eyes—her bosom was throbbing with a kindred sentiment. As for Gustavus himself,—intoxicated with the bliss of those feelings with which the presence and the contact of the beautiful quadroom inspired him, he forgot his lost treasure—he forgot his grandsire and Winifred—he thought only of the present happiness which was within his reach.

The lovers gained the house; and they sat down to breakfast. They lingered over the repast, because there was so much joy in being thus together; for though there had been no real quarrel betwixt them, yet they felt as if they were experiencing all the sweetness of a reconciliation. Mr. Pinnoek presently made his appearance; and Gustavus rose to greet him with all that frankness and gaiety of temper which he had been wont to display until the last two or three days.

“Well, my dear boy,” said the worthy planter, “you are beginning to recover from the effect of the severe blow you received? It was a great calamity truly: but the youthful mind should never give way to despondency as you have yielded.”

“Forgive me, my dear sir,” said Gustavus, pressing Mr. Pinnoek’s hands; “for I am now myself again. I am afraid that I have behaved rudely, churlishly, and ungratefully, in wandering away from the house, or in keeping my own chamber, when I ought to have been thankfully availing myself of the hospitalities of your dwelling——”

“Say not another word upon the subject!” ejaculated Mr. Pinnoek. “Why, where is Emily running to now? She quits the room at the very moment our conversation is growing interesting! Ah! perhaps she thinks it is about to take a more serious turn, and that you and I may have something to discuss. Well, so we have.”

Thus speaking, Mr. Pinnoek sat down to the breakfast-table; and while heaping viands on his plate, he went on discoursing.

“I have already hinted to you, my dear boy, that if you like to remain with me altogether, I can render your services available in superintending the plantation, so that not for a single instant need you with any false pride or fastidious delicacy fancy that you are eating the bread of dependence. You love Emily—and she loves you. You have now no need to rush across the Atlantic and separate from her,—though at the same time, if you wish to go and see your relatives before you settle down in Jamaica, I have told you that I will be your banker for all expenses.”

“A thousand thanks, my dear sir!” exclaimed Gustavus; “but I have now totally abandoned

the idea of that voyage—Oh, yes! totally abandoned it!”

“Very well, then,” continued Mr. Pinnoek: “you will remain with us; and in as short a time as is consistent with prudence, delicacy, and propriety, you may lead Emily to the altar. Now then, no thanks! I know you are a grateful young fellow—I have conceived an affection for you—and that is enough!”

Having thus spoken, Mr. Pinnoek rose from the table, pressed the youth’s hand warmly, and hurried from the room; for the chairs was at the door to bear him into Kingston. Gustavus soon rejoined Emily, who was waiting for him in the garden; and he told her everything which had just taken place between himself and Mr. Pinnoek. His entire appearance—his manner, the animation of his countenance, the tone in which he spoke—all denoted the liveliest joy; so that the beautiful quadroom now seemed completely happy once more.

In the middle of the day, when the heat of the sun was most sultry, Emily remained in the house, in order to attend to certain domestic duties; and Gustavus sauntered towards the sea-shore. He was fond of looking upon that element on which he had voyaged in the Catherine Millard; and notwithstanding that his voyage had experienced so calamitous a termination—notwithstanding likewise that with his present plans and prospects it was little likely that a seafaring life would ever again become his profession—yet did he still retain much of that interest in respect to the ocean which had in the first instance tempted him to embark upon it. Seeking a secluded and shady spot upon the sea-shore, Gustavus threw himself down upon the strand to contemplate the expanse of waters; and from the image of Emily his thoughts travelled across that ocean to the relatives whom he had left in England. He could not help again sighing on account of the loss of that fortune which would have enabled him to administer so materially to the comforts of his grandfather and of Winifred: but the more he reflected upon the sudden disappearance of his treasure, the more mysterious did it seem.

While engaged in these meditations, he heard footsteps approaching; and looking round, he beheld Mr. Hargrave. He had not seen the misanthrope for some days—indeed not since the occasion when he expressed his gratitude for that eccentric individual’s intervention on his behalf with the Governor of Jamaica. He now started up to his feet, and pressed with grateful fervour the hand which he at once seized upon, and which for a few moments was abandoned to his clasp.

“I have heard of your misfortune, young man,” said Mr. Hargrave: “but it was only this morning that I learnt it. I have been indisposed, and have scarcely crossed the threshold of my own dwelling. There I hear nothing: for the old negro who attends upon me, never opens his lips unless I first speak to him; and as a general rule I care too little to hear the sound of the human voice to give encouragement to discourse. Ah! there is an exception however: for I take delight in listening to the prattle of children, because my mind feels satisfied with the certainty that there is no guile in their joyous gossip.”

"You must have a very evil opinion of human nature generally?" said Gustavus.

"And who that possesses the slightest knowledge of the world," exclaimed Mr. Hargrave, "can entertain any other opinion? I know that you are a good young man, and that therefore you are one of the isolated exceptions. If it were not so, I never should have conceived any interest in your welfare—I never should have taken any thought on your account. I should not have helped you the other day to the possession of a little fortune—much less should I now express my commiseration and sympathy on account of its loss."

"I am grateful to you, sir, for your good opinion of me and for your kind feeling," said Gustavus. "The loss is to me a sad one indeed!—for I have relations in England to whose comfort and welfare——"

"Yes—I know it," interrupted Mr. Hargrave. "You have a grandfather and a cousin——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Barrington: "and how did you become aware of these facts? I do not think that I mentioned them to you on the last occasion, when we met——"

"Oh, yes you did," responded Mr. Hargrave curtly; for he saw that he had been speaking somewhat incautiously, and he was apprehensive lest it should be suspected by the youth that he had been an unseen listener to his conversation with Emily in the morning. "And so you are very anxious to do something for your grandfather and your cousin?" continued Mr. Hargrave. "I suppose, therefore, that they are poor?"

"My grandfather has been for five-and-twenty years a captive in a debtors' gaol," answered Gustavus, in a tone of mournful solemnity; "and my poor cousin Winifred—an orphan—heaven knows how friendless she may be at this moment!"

The tears trickled down his cheeks: but he hastily wiped them away, exclaiming, "After all, it is useless to repine for the loss of gold, which seems to have disappeared beyond a chance of recovery!"

"But how happens it," inquired Mr. Hargrave, "that your grandfather can have been for so many years a prisoner in a debtor's gaol?"

"I scarcely know," replied Gustavus, "how he first became involved in difficulties: but he has been engaged in a Chancery suit which seems interminable——"

"Does he not employ honest and straightforward solicitors?" inquired Hargrave,—"if such indeed are to be found on the face of the earth," he added bitterly.

"In the first instance," rejoined Gustavus, "my grandfather employed a Mr. Waldron; but that gentleman committed suicide. There was some strange mystery attached to the circumstance—I am unacquainted with any details—certain however it is that he destroyed himself; for so I have heard my grandfather say;—and as he was succeeded in his business by a Mr. Timperley, this Mr. Timperley became my grandfather's attorney. Indeed," added Gustavus, "the suit of 'Barrington versus Dallam' is as famous——"

"Rather *infamous*!" ejaculated Hargrave with vehemence.

"Then you do know something about it?" asked Gustavus, surveying the misanthrope with mingled surprise and curiosity.

"I know nothing more about it than what you have just told me," responded Mr. Hargrave: "but surely the epithet of *infamous* is not too strong in its application to the case of a man who has been held in custody for twenty-five years? Why, a burglar could not be punished more severely!"

"True!" said Gustavus. "Yet it is a circumstance arising out of the English law, and therefore tolerated, I suppose, by the British constitution; and Englishmen seem generally to be very proud alike of their laws and their constitution."

"Proud indeed!" echoed Mr. Hargrave, with the bitterest sarcasm. "But if you had not lost this little fortune——"

"Oh! I should have borne it all to my grandfather and my cousin!" ejaculated Gustavus, with enthusiastic fervour. "Even if such a sum would not liberate my poor grandeire, it would at least contribute materially to his comfort and happiness——But alas! it is useless to speculate on the subject, for the gold is gone!"

Mr. Hargrave reflected for a few moments; and then he said, with a curtness that was by no means unusual with him, "I suppose you intend to marry Emily Pinnock?"

"Yes," responded Gustavus. "Did I not assure you the other day that my love was most honourable? I have spoken to her father—he has consented—he has held out certain advantageous prospects——"

"And you do not mean to go to England?" demanded Mr. Hargrave.

"Alas! it is now useless."

"To be sure! to be sure! The gold is lost, and you have no longer the means of administering to the comfort and happiness of your relatives. Ah! by the bye, I think I heard that your suspicions in the first instance fell upon a negro named Nelson?"

"Yes—but I can scarcely say that they rest any longer in that quarter: indeed I have now no right to suspect him—it would be a flagrant injustice on my part——"

"I see," said Mr. Hargrave, "that your principles are very good. Under the impression of such a serious loss it would not be astonishing if in the soreness of your mind you *did* harbour suspicions that were unjust——"

"Oh, no! I am incapable of that!" replied Gustavus, with a tone and air of such frank sincerity that the misanthrope could not help gazing upon him with admiration.

"And therefore you now suspect nobody?" said Mr. Hargrave.

"The whole affair is most mysterious," replied Gustavus: and he described all the circumstances attending the loss of the ore and gold dust, precisely as they are already known to the reader.

"Well, young man," said the misanthrope, "it is a great misfortune—and I pity you."

With these words Mr. Hargrave abruptly rose from the spot where he had been seated in discourse with young Mr. Barrington; and he hastened away. When he had taken his departure, Gustavus reflected on all that had passed between them; and he said to himself, "He is in-

deed an eccentric and singular being—but evidently good-hearted ;”

At the expiration of a little while Gustavus likewise quitted the sea-shore; and he began to retrace his way towards Mount Pleasant. He was soon in the neighbourhood of that crystal streamlet where his interview with Emily Pinnoek had taken place in the morning; and now all of a sudden a piercing scream smote his ear. It was the voice of his Emily—and she was shrieking for help! Instinctively Gustavus caught up a large stick which happened to lie in his path—and he rushed forward amidst the trees, in the direction whence the cries came. A few moments, and he was on the spot where his succour was so much needed—for there was Emily struggling in the embrace of the colossal African Nelson. What then ensued was the work but of a moment; for the stout bludgeon which Gustavus held in his hand, fell with terrific violence upon the head of the negro, who was literally hurled by the blow to a considerable distance.

With a wild cry of joy Emily flew into her lover's arms. The negro picked himself up in the slow and languid manner of one who was half-stunned and stupefied by the blow which had felled him: but his eyes glared with a devilish hatred and fiendish vindictiveness upon Gustavus.

“Begone, villain!” cried the youth; “or by heaven—Ah!” he suddenly ejaculated, as an idea struck him; and springing towards Nelson, he caught him by the throat and hurled him to the ground. “All my suspicions concerning you have come back to my mind!” continued Gustavus, with fierce and vehement utterance. “A villain who would thus outrage a young lady, would scruple not to commit any other crime! Tell me, wretch—where is the gold of which you plundered me?”

The negro—now completely subdued, and naturally a coward—spoke in a tone of entreaty, begging Gustavus not to do him a mischief; but still he vehemently protested his innocence of the charge of robbery. Young Barrington was undecided how to act; and still for a few moments he clutched the prostrate negro so forcibly by the throat as almost to strangle him—until the thought struck the youth that though Nelson might yield to the dictates of his brutal lust and endeavour to coerce Emily to his purpose, yet it really did not follow that he should likewise be the author of the robbery.

“Begone, villain!” suddenly ejaculated young Barrington; “and rest assured that your master Mr. Thurlow shall be made acquainted with your diabolical conduct towards this young lady!”

He now suffered Nelson to rise; and the negro began to move off, with an air in which a dastard submissiveness was blended with a sinister and lurking vindictiveness. Gustavus turned from him with abhorrence and loathing, and offered Emily his arm, to which she clung with a fervid tenacity. Suddenly the negro gave vent to a terrific howl, or rather a cry of rage and spite, as if it emanated from the throat of a wild beast; and plunging amidst the trees, he was the next moment lost to the view of the lovers.

Gustavus—despite his natural courage, which amounted to a chivalrous heroism—was startled by that terrific cry of savage rage and fierce ma-

lignity which so suddenly burst upon his ear; while Emily fainted in his arms. He hastily bore her to the side of the streamlet: he laid her upon the bank—he dipped his kerchief in the crystal water—and he bathed her countenance. She still had on the same light dress which she had worn in the morning; and this had become so much disordered in her struggle with the ferocious negro, that her bosom was all bare. As she came back to consciousness, she threw her arms about her lover's neck—she strained him in her embrace, as if by its very ardour she sought to convey to him the expression of that gratitude which her lips could not as yet shape in words. And he himself, overjoyed at her resuscitation, strained her with equal fervour to his own breast. There they were, alone together on the bank of that streamlet—the umbrageous foliage of the fruit trees shielding them from the beams of the sun!—there they were, in that delicious shade! They were folded in each other's arms: the superb dark eyes of Emily were gazing up full of love and passion into the countenance of Gustavus. He caught from the warm and impassioned quadron the intoxication of feeling which had taken possession of herself;—and thus were they alone together!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TREASURE.

AN hour afterwards Gustavus was in his own chamber at Mount Pleasant. He was seated at the open casement; and he was wrapped in profound reflection. His mind was not altogether at ease; but still it was in that state which can scarcely be described—for pleasing and painful thoughts were conflicting within him.

From this deep abstraction he was presently aroused by the sound of Mr. Pinnoek's vehicle arriving from Kingston; and starting up from his seat, Gustavus began to dress for dinner. When he descended to the dining-room, he found Emily engaged in arranging the flowers in the vases; while Mr. Pinnoek was telling her, in his wonted accents of cheerfulness, all the news that he had brought from Kingston. The looks of the beautiful quadron and Gustavus presently met; but at the same time a deep blush mantled upon the countenance of each. Mr. Pinnoek noticed not the circumstance: he was in a hurry to sit down to dinner, for the table was already spread for the repast. Neither Gustavus nor Emily mentioned a syllable of the adventure with the negro Nelson; nor had the youth taken the slightest step towards making Mr. Thurlow, Nelson's master, acquainted with the outrage that had been attempted upon Miss Pinnoek.

On the following day—at that sultry noontide period when Emily was wont to remain in the house—Gustavus again strolled from the villa, and took the direction of the sea shore. He had not been long there when he perceived Mr. Hargrave approaching; and on beholding the misanthrope, the colour suddenly mounted to the youth's face. But the next instant he conquered, or at least concealed whatsoever feeling it was which thus made

him blush : and he accosted Mr. Hargrave with his wonted frankness.

"If you have an hour to spare," said the misanthrope abruptly, "I desire that you will come with me to my little cottage yonder. I wish to speak to you particularly."

"To speak to me particularly?" said Gustavus, who for a moment felt as if he were quailing beneath the penetrating eyes of Mr. Hargrave.

"Yes. For what other purpose should I ask you to come to my house? I at least have no sinister design in reference to you," he added, with a strange significance.

"Oh, my dear sir!" exclaimed the youth, "how can you think that such an assurance as this is requisite? If I hesitated for a moment—or seemed to hesitate—it was only because it appeared to me strange—"

"That I should have anything of importance to say to you?" exclaimed Mr. Hargrave; "or, indeed, that I should speak to you at all—for you have of course been told that since I came to reside in this island I have never been accustomed to speak to any one? Well, no matter! There are persons for whom even a misanthrope like me may be inclined to make an exception; and there may be circumstances which render such an exception necessary. Come with me, I say."

"Willingly," responded Gustavus: and he followed the misanthrope towards the cottage.

Not another syllable was spoken during the walk thither; but each individual seemed to be absorbed in his own peculiar reflections. There was a certain degree of nervousness and apprehension in the mind of Gustavus, as if he more or less dreaded what might be the topic on which Mr. Hargrave meant to discourse with him; while the misanthrope himself had a stern expression of countenance, and his lips were closely compressed, as if it were indeed something of no mean importance for which he was leading the youth towards his home.

They reached the cottage, which they entered; and Mr. Hargrave conducted Gustavus into a small parlour, very modestly furnished. The instant the door was closed, Mr. Hargrave turned sharp round upon Gustavus, almost with an air as if he meditated some treacherous attack; and he said, "Would you like to know who was the thief of your box of gold?"

"Good heavens! is it possible that you know?" exclaimed Gustavus, amazed at a question which seemed to be full of hope, and which so abruptly broached a topic that was very different from the one to which his nervous apprehensions had been pointing.

"Yes—I know who abstracted your treasure," replied Mr. Hargrave. "But in the first instance behold it!"

With these words, he applied a key to a cupboard—opened the door—and displayed the well-known box which had contained the treasure. Gustavus could scarcely believe his eyes: he felt as if he were in the midst of a wild bewildering dream!

"Look!" continued Mr. Hargrave, unfastening the staple and lifting the lid of the box: "the golden contents are here, safe and secure! You are again rich, Gustavus! And now, in the name of heaven, take your treasure, and be off to Eng-

land with it as quick as possible. You have nothing more to do in Jamaica—and if you are wise you will never come back to the island again."

In the wild enthusiasm of his joy and the bewilderment of his senses at thus regaining his lost treasure Gustavus failed to catch the entire purport of the misanthrope's words. Yes—there was the box! and there were its golden contents! But how could they possibly have come into the hands of Mr. Hargrave?—how could he be their restorer? because not for an instant was it to be supposed that he had been their purloiner.

"Oh, how good and kind a friend are you to me!—a friend in every sense!" exclaimed Gustavus, when he was at length able to give utterance to a word. "Strange unaccountable being that you are! But, ah! you have forgotten to tell me who was the thief that purloined this treasure;—and yet you commenced by asking me whether I wished to know."

"And do you still wish to know?" inquired Mr. Hargrave, fixing his eyes with mingled keenness and commiseration upon the youth.

"Yes—I wish to know," rejoined Gustavus. "Why should I not?"

"Then you shall know!" answered the misanthrope; and after a pause, he added slowly, and accentuating every syllable, "It was for no purpose of mere vile plunder that the treasure was taken from you: it was to serve another and very different end—it was to prevent you from going to England—it was to keep you in Jamaica: for the thief was none other than Emily Pincock herself!"

"No, no!—tell me not this!" exclaimed Gustavus, with a wild cry of mingled anguish and astonishment. "What! Emily do a thing like this? No, no! I would believe many things—I would believe almost anything rather than that Emily Pincock could be guilty of such a crime!"

"Poor Gustavus!" said Mr. Hargrave, with more feeling than he had ever yet displayed towards the youth; "you must end by believing it. You are indeed young in the world that you shrink from believing that which at the slightest hint ought to be evident to your senses! Yes—inexperienced must you be that at the very outset you did not suffer your suspicions to fall upon the right person."

Gustavus had sunk aghast and dismayed upon a seat: a torrent of tears now gushed forth from his eyes, and his breast was convulsed with heart-wrung sobs. Suddenly he started up; and seizing upon the box of gold, was rushing towards the door, when the misanthrope held him back with an iron grasp, exclaiming, "What are you about to do, rash youth?"

"To hurl this gold into the stream which winds near your garden!" ejaculated Gustavus. "Accursed gold, which has proved the means of destroying my faith in one whom—"

"Be calm, Gustavus!" said Mr. Hargrave: "this frenzy of excitement will avail you in no possible way! Do you think that you can pass through life without experiencing some of those bitter lessons which belong to the lot of humanity? You are now taking your initiation in the school of these harsh stern teachings. Severe though this lesson be, pray to God that you may never have a severer!"

"Oh! what lesson of life could be *more* terrible?" cried Gustavus in accents of despair, as he flung the box upon the table with a force which almost shook down that piece of furniture. "But tell me, how knew you all this?—how knew you that it was Emily who did it?"

"I first conjectured it," replied Mr. Hargrave; "and it has since been proven to me by circumstantial evidence. If you have patience as well as the inclination to listen, I will tell you everything."

"I have patience—I will endeavour to be calm!" rejoined Gustavus: but he was shivering with an inward excitement.

"Now, I am going to deal frankly with you," resumed the misanthrope; "and you must not be angry if I tell you that yesterday morning I was a listener to the entire conversation which took place between yourself and Emily Pinnock on the bank of the streamlet."

"You a listener, Mr. Hargrave?" cried Gustavus, partly in astonishment and partly in indignation.

"Yes—a listener," he coolly and quietly repeated. "But I did not go thither for the purpose of listening: it was accident that led my steps in that direction—I saw your meeting with Emily—and fancying there was something strange in your manner, I stood concealed that I might observe you. Do you think that I was actuated by any vulgar curiosity? No, you cannot imagine it! But you are well aware that I experience a degree of interest in you; and I will even confess that I was smitten with pain when I saw how depressed and downcast you looked. I was *then* ignorant of the loss of your treasure—I had heard nothing of it—for it was perfectly true that I had for three or four days been confined at home by indisposition. So you see, Gustavus, that I did not listen or watch from any bad motive, nor from any unfriendly one."

"No, no, Mr. Hargrave! I am sure you did not!" exclaimed Gustavus; "and I was wrong to express any angry feeling!"

"Enough, my dear boy!—let that pass," said the misanthrope. "Well, I listened and I heard everything which took place between yourself and Emily. The loss of your treasure was then for the first time revealed to my knowledge; and I felt assured I could at once, if I had chosen, lay my hand upon the authoress of that calamity. I purposely sought you on the sea-shore in the afternoon of yesterday; for it was then my intention to communicate my suspicion—but I was held back by the thought that it was but a suspicion after all! I left you with a determination of taking some step to investigate the matter, though I scarcely knew what plan I should adopt. At a later hour I met the negro Nelson, who was rushing along as if in a frenzy. I immediately stopped him. These negroes entertain a species of superstitious terror of myself—but a terror which is also mixed with a certain degree of reverence and respect. Nelson therefore stopped when I commanded him. I inquired the cause of his excitement. I spoke gently and kindly to him: the fellow was moved somewhat—he dropped a few words from his lips—and they afforded a clue to the comprehension of something that had happened in reference to Emily and your-

self. Then, by dint of further questioning, coaxing, and cajoling—by dealing gently with the man, and speaking reassuringly to him—I elicited all that he had to reveal."

Mr. Hargrave paused for a few moments, and then said, "Was it not during the night of the 20th of October that your treasure was lost?"

"Yes," replied Gustavus: "it was on the morning of the 21st that I discovered the loss—exactly five days ago."

"And it was on that night," proceeded Mr. Hargrave, "that Nelson beheld Emily Pinnock at the casement of your bed-chamber?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Gustavus: "then, alas! it must be true. But still—but still, what faith can we put in the words of that villainous negro?"

"Every faith," responded Mr. Hargrave, "when a particular assertion is corroborated by events. Now listen! that negro confessed to me that he has for some time past been fired by the beauty of Emily Pinnock; and he has been driven almost to frenzy by the contemplation of her charms. In the evening preceding the night when your treasure was stolen, Nelson was sent with a note from Mr. Thurlow to Mr. Pinnock—"

"True!—and it was that circumstance, coupled with the idea that he might in the garden have overheard something which Emily and I were saying in reference to the gold—it was this, I repeat," continued Gustavus, "which led me in the first instance to fix my suspicions upon him."

"Yes—on that evening," continued Mr. Hargrave, "Nelson beheld you walking in the garden together: but it really does not appear that he overheard you say anything to each other in respect to the gold. But he was again maddened by the sight of Emily Pinnock: he has confessed to me that if the Enemy of Mankind had suddenly appeared before him and offered him the possession of Emily in exchange for his immortal soul, he would have greedily clutched at the compact. He returned home to his hut—he shunned his companions—he refused to join in their evening sports—he shut himself up in his dwelling. But he could not sleep; and at length, goaded by his evil passions—that state of mind in which he felt he must do something desperate to possess himself of Emily—he stole forth. No one beheld him—"

"No," interjected Gustavus; "for every one of his fellow-negroes subsequently vowed that Nelson had not quitted his hut."

"But he *did*, nevertheless," continued Mr. Hargrave; "and he stole towards Mount Pleasant. There he concealed himself amongst the trees, watching the house—racking his brain for some means of penetrating and making Emily his own, even though he might subsequently encounter the penalty of death upon the scaffold! But while he was still watching from his lurking-place, in the middle of that night, he beheld a casement open—he saw some one in a night-toilet there—he recognised Emily! He knew it was your chamber; and the idea that Emily was already possessed by you was intolerable to his mind. He retreated from his hiding-place—he stole back to his hut. On the morrow, when suddenly arrested and taken before his own master, Mr. Thurlow, the magistrate, on a charge

of stealing the gold, he was about to reveal what he had done and what he had seen, when the thought struck him that if he were to make confession of a burglarious intent for the purpose of committing one species of outrage, it would be deemed evident that he was thoroughly capable of having perpetrated the other. So he contented himself with a vehement denial of the imputation,—well knowing moreover that no one could prove he had quitted his but during the past night. He was at once discharged for want of evidence."

"And then," ejaculated Gustavus, "I was sorry that he had been accused, for in my moments of deliberate reflection I felt that there had really been no evidence on which to suspect him."

"I now come to the transaction of yesterday," continued Mr. Hargrave. "Nelson, still having the image of Miss Pinnock constantly in his mind, happened to be passing along the bank of the streamlet which separates Mr. Pinnock's and Mr. Thurlow's domains,—when he beheld Emily at a little distance. She was alone; and without an instant's hesitation the negro sprang across the stream, presented himself before her, and vowed that he would possess her, even though he were to be put to death the next moment. You however appeared upon the spot—you rescued Emily—and the negro fled. It was in the midst of his flight that I stopped him, as I have already told you; and I succeeded in eliciting from him all the particulars which I have just been reciting."

"Then Nelson," said Gustavus, with a trembling voice, "knows—or at least suspects that Emily took my gold?"

"So far from knowing it, he does not even suspect it," replied Mr. Hargrave. "These negroes are naturally deficient in readiness of wit; and Nelson is perhaps more than usually dull in this respect. He believes that Miss Pinnock has surrendered herself to your arms, and that for this purpose she was in your chamber; but he had no knowledge of any motive which she might have to abstract your gold—he knew not that she was anxious to take some step which might prevent you from proceeding to England. Thus to him the loss of the treasure has been, and still remains, a profound mystery. If for a moment he had intended to explain to Mr. Thurlow what he saw on the night when he watched Mount Pleasant, it was only for the purpose of proving that he could not have entered your chamber, for that some one else was there. But as we have seen, a second consideration made him hold his peace upon that point."

"And now tell me, my dear sir," inquired Gustavus, "how you came to discover the box of gold?"

"I had already full well conjectured," proceeded Mr. Hargrave, "from what I overheard yesterday morning between yourself and Emily, that she had abstracted the treasure: but when yesterday afternoon I learnt that tale from Nelson's lips—the tale of how she was seen at your easement in the night—I had no longer any doubt. I was convinced that my suspicions were correct. I at once took the resolution to sift the matter to the very bottom; and I deliberated upon the course which I should adopt. I asked myself how Emily could have disposed of the box? Not in her own cham-

ber! not in any place where it was likely to be discovered sooner than it might suit her views for such discovery to be made! You had told me that you were shortly to marry Emily: so I reasoned within myself that when this marriage should have taken place, and when you should be indissolubly linked to her, she would some day suddenly pretend to have discovered the lost treasure. With this aim she had doubtless hidden it where it could be readily found again. Such were my reflections. But where had she hidden it? She had most probably buried it. Where had she buried it? At no great distance from the house, because the box was heavy for her to carry, and because on the night of its abstraction she would have been afraid to remain too long absent from her chamber. Thus was it that I reasoned; and under these impressions I last night penetrated into the garden of Mount Pleasant. It was a beautiful night, and every object was perfectly clear. I examined well all that part of the garden which was nearest to the back door, by which I concluded that Emily might have stolen forth on the night of her exploit. I had the ramrod of a gun with me; and I probed the earth in every spot which I thought at all likely to have been selected for the concealment of the treasure. It was chiefly in those places which a gardener would not require to disturb for some time, that I patiently and carefully pursued my researches. At length they were successful: for in the midst of a clump of trees the ramrod struck against something hard. I went to work—I scooped out the earth with a mason's trowel which I had taken with me for the purpose—and there is the result!" added Mr. Hargrave, pointing to the box of gold.

Gustavus had listened with a most painful interest to this narrative, which tended to show his Emily in so evil a light, but which on the other hand as lucidly displayed the sagacity, the forethought, and the perseverance of the misanthrope. When the tale was concluded, young Berrington heaved a profound sigh; and then he said to Mr. Hargrave, "Accept my sincerest gratitude for all that you have so successfully done to restore to me my lost treasure. It was you who obtained the gold for me in the first instance!—it is you who have given it to me back again when I had deemed it irrecoverably lost!"

"And now," asked Mr. Hargrave, fixing his eyes keenly upon the youth, "how do you purpose to act? A ship will leave for England the day after to-morrow——"

"And by that ship I depart!" responded Gustavus firmly.

"Tis well, young man," said the misanthrope. "Adhere to that resolution—and I shall esteem you. Emily Pinnock is no wife for you! Of that you must now be well assured! You and I shall meet again—yes, once again, and for the last time. The day after to-morrow the ship leaves for England: I shall see you at the moment of embarkation—for I may have something to communicate—or perhaps a letter of which you will become the bearer. And now go! Take your box with you—and may you make a good use of the treasure which has again fallen into your hands!"

Gustavus reiterated the assurance of his gratitude towards Mr. Hargrave; and shouldering his box, he took his departure. The state of his mind



was now a twofold character: he experienced an immense joy at the recovery of his wealth; but his reflections in reference to Emily Pinnock were gloomy indeed—far more gloomy than even the keen-sighted Mr. Hargrave could possibly have anticipated. In this frame of mind—exhibiting as it were a quality of the brain, one portion throbbing with joy, the other maddened with a deep sense of grief—Gustavus pursued his way; and he reached Mount Pleasant. It was now about three o'clock in the afternoon: he entered the sitting-room from the garden, by means of a casement which stood open; and he deposited his box upon the table. Emily was not there; he sat down to await her presence. Not many minutes had he thus tarried, when the door opened; and it was with an ejaculation of joy that she was bounding towards him, when she suddenly stopped short on beholding the mingled sternness and gloominess of his looks. He rose—and with-

out saying a word, pointed to the box upon the table.

Emily at once comprehended that everything was discovered—though she had not the slightest conception how the discovery could have been brought about. Indeed, she had no immediate leisure for such reflection, for the blow struck her with a stupifying effect: she staggered back and sank upon a sofa. Gustavus advanced towards the casement and closed it: he next proceeded to shut the room door, which Emily in her joy at beholding that he had returned from his walk sooner than she expected, had left open; and then accosting her, he said in a voice full of emotion, "I did not think that you could have done this!"

"Pardon me, Gustavus!" she exclaimed, throwing herself at his feet; "for you know it was through my love of you that I did it! I could not endure the idea of separation. I pictured to

myself a thousand things—the dangers of the sea—shipwreck—conflagration! O Gustavus, I should have died if you had left me—and I thought that you wished me to live that I might become your's?"

Emily spoke in a voice so full of a touching pathos—so earnest in its appeal—so sincere in its assurance of love, that Gustavus was already moved.

She was kneeling at his feet—she had thrown her arms around him—it was indeed an ignobly supplicative posture for her to assume towards him; but still he could not bid her rise, for *that* would have seemed like an overture of reconciliation—and though he was moved somewhat, yet it was not sufficiently for him to be reconciled to his offending mistress.

"You do not speak to me, Gustavus," she said, passionately and entreatingly; "you have ceased to love me—or else you are seeking the first ready pretext to cast me off and abandon me. But no, no, Gustavus! you will not do this? The quadroon girl is your's by the tenderest of ties—she is already your wife in the sight of heaven—she has abandoned herself to you;—and it would not be mere desertion on your part—it would be the most infamous betrayal!"

"Oh, that fatal moment of weakness in which we both erred—both sinned!" exclaimed Gustavus, with passionate rage and remorse; "it has bound me to you by a bond which I dare not break—though every other bond would I have broken after the discovery of this day!"

Slowly did the quadroon girl rise up from her suppliant posture: and bending her large dark eyes with indescribable tenderness as well as mournfulness upon the youth, she said in tremulous accents, "If it will be more conducive, Gustavus, to your happiness that you should leave me—that you should desert and abandon me—depart! I will sacrifice myself for you! Disgraced and dishonoured as I now am in every way—in my own estimation and in your's—I shall soon pine and fade—my days will not be long on this earth—and when you are afar off—perhaps wedded to your cousin Winifred—you will think of the quadroon Emily, who thought no sacrifice too great to prove her love for you—who gave you first her honour and then her life!"

The tears were now streaming fast down the cheeks of Gustavus.

Never had Emily seemed so eminently beautiful as she was at this moment! Those large dark eyes of her's were full of tenderness and pathos instead of the glow and fervour of passion; and her voice—that fluid musical voice—had such sottly mournful cadences as she now spoke, that Gustavus was all but unmanned: still he was not quite so!

"Emily," he said, hastily dashing away his tears, "it cuts me to the very soul to give utterance to such words—but all confidence is now lost between us, and where there is no confidence there can be no love!"

"Oh! is my crime so very, very great?" she inquired, in the same melancholy accents as before. "Did I irrecoverably make away with your gold?—did I so dispose of it that it never could benefit your relations in England? No! I merely concealed it for a period; for I swear to you that on

the very day which would unite us, I should have thrown myself at your feet—I should have told you everything—and I should have said to you, 'Now lose not a moment in transmitting the treasure to your grandsire and your cousin!'—And would they have been much the worse for tarrying a few short weeks before this gold reached them? Oh, if the entire case was reversed, Gustavus—if it were you who had hidden my gold and I had just made the discovery—I should look upon it as a proof of your ardent devoted love, and I should pardon you!"

It was still with the most melting pathos that Emily spoke, while she threw into her entire demeanour so much dejection—so much despondency—and at the same time so much tenderness, that Gustavus was profoundly touched.

According to the transition of her feelings did the colour come and go beneath the transparent duskliness of the skin: but the redness of the lips remained; and as they moved in speech, they displayed the teeth of ivory whiteness. Her bosom palpitated—its undulations were revealed by the rising and sinking of the light dress which defined her contours; and altogether she was a being whose appearance was only too well calculated to impart success to the appealing prayer which she was addressing to a hitherto ardent and impassioned lover.

Nevertheless, as Gustavus still appeared to waver and to hesitate—as he was struggling against the powerful sympathies and the strong affections which agitated within him—the beautiful quadroon continued her speech.

"After all," she said; "for what are you blaming me so severely? for what are you thinking of abandoning me? For a deception which I have practised! You know that it would be ridiculous to call it a theft—preposterous to imagine that I intended to self-appropriate your gold! Have I not all the luxuries and comforts that I desire? is not my uncle rich? and shall I not be his heiress? Well then, it was not a theft: it was a deception. But oh, Gustavus! have you too not been guilty of deception, though of another kind—and have you not made me your accomplice therein? Is not my good uncle deceived while he continues to imagine that I am pure and stainless?—and dare you go to him and say that in return for his hospitality and kindness you have seduced his niece? No—you dare not!—you are compelled to dissemble in his presence—and that dissimulation is deception!"

"But, Emily!" returned Gustavus, after a few moments silence, "such deception as this is very different—"

"Hear me, Gustavus," interrupted the quadroon: "I have yet a few more words to say. Yes—we are both guilty of deception in having committed a weakness—a crime—and yet in daring to look my uncle in the face as if we were still both pure and virtuous as at first! And then too, did we not suppress the incident of the outrage committed by the negro?—and why did we suppress it? Because our own error followed closely thereupon—because it almost appeared to be a consequence brought about by the other's villany—it threw us together at the moment—it flung me forward and with a disordered dress into your arms—and you profited by

the opportunity! Therefore was it as if by tacit consent that we held our peace in respect to Nelson's outrage; for I know that you felt as I did—and this feeling was that we dared not touch upon a topic which had associations that would have brought the blushes of shame to our cheeks. Oh! pardon this long discourse, Gustavus! I do not blame you—I do not reproach you: I love you, if possible, more than ever!—but my object is to prove that if you yourself are not altogether guiltless of deception, it is cruel to meet my deception so heavily and so severely!"

All the time the quadroon was thus speaking, young Barrington felt as if he could fling his arms about her neck and strain her to his breast: and yet some contrary power held him back. There was a world of eloquence in the soft pathetic energy of her language; and yet he could not help feeling that there was a world of fine-drawn sophistry in it likewise; for the deceptions whereof she spoke were discrepant indeed from that deception which she herself had committed.

And then too Gustavus thought of Mr. Hargrave—of the pledge which he had given the misanthrope to leave the island with the least possible delay: he remembered how Mr. Hargrave had declared that he should esteem him if he remained faithful to that pledge; and Gustavus felt that he could not easily endure the scorn and contempt of such a man as Hargrave.

Thus he stood irresolute how to act: he knew not what course to adopt.

"Am I to remain unforgiven?" asked Emily, after a pause, during which she stood like a suppliant before him, with all the native unstudied graces of form and attitude, and with her luminous dark eyes bent downward and curtained by their long ebony fringes. "I have already said, Gustavus, that if you feel your happiness will be ensured by a abandoning me, I am ready to sacrifice myself for your sake. But at least forgive me! Leave me not in anger! I am not the same to you now as I was before we erred and sinned: I am your wife in the sight of heaven—and you must not lightly resolve upon refusing your pardon to one who has so sacred a claim upon you!"

"Refuse it? No! no!" ejaculated Gustavus: and the next moment Emily was clasped in his arms.

There is an ineffable luxury in a reconciliation between lovers. The kisses with which they seal it are the sweetest and most fervid that can be bestowed—their arms strain each other with a stronger pressure—they appear as if anxious to efface by means of present demonstrations of affection the impressions of recent unkindness.

And so was it now with Gustavus and Emily; and while the youth held the beautiful quadroon in his arms—pressed his lips to hers—drank in the fragrance of her breath—and caught from her luminous eyes the transfusion of her own fond enraptured feelings, he thought no more of Hargrave—he thought of nothing in the whole world but the bliss of the present moment.

When the first ebullition of these feelings attendant upon reconciliation had passed, Gustavus and Emily had leisure for deliberate discourse.

The youth explained to the quadroon everything which had taken place between himself and Mr. Hargrave; and Emily now learnt for the first time how she had been seen by

the negro at the casement of her youthful lover's room on the night when she abstracted the box of gold. She confessed to him all the truth.

"I penetrated into your chamber," she said, "determined to take the only step which could prevent you from leaving the island and seeking your native land. Gently I opened the door; your regular breathing convinced me that you slept. I bent over you, Gustavus—I should have imprinted a kiss upon your brow but that I feared to awaken you. I possessed myself of the box of gold; and then, to give a burglarians colour to the whole proceeding, I opened the casement, and with the diamond of my ring I cut a pane of glass, so that it might seem as if it had been done from the outside, and that its object was to allow a hand to be introduced to open the fastening inside. You may conceive how violently my heart palpitated, and how I dreaded every moment lest you should awake! But you slept soundly: and my task was accomplished. I swear to you, Gustavus, that when on the following morning I witnessed your mental anguish at the loss of your gold, I commiserated you—Oh! deeply, deeply commiserated you!—and it went to my heart to keep the secret! But love is selfish: and, Oh! my love is so strong, so devoted, so fond!—and through its very fondness has it won me your pardon!"

"Yes, dearest Emily," replied the infatuated youth; "not another syllable of reproach shall you ever hear from my lips! But we have been speaking of deceptions—and now it seems to me that some new deception will have to be practised to account to your uncle for the recovery of this gold."

"Do you think," asked Emily, after a few moments' reflection, "that Mr. Hargrave will tell my uncle everything when next they meet?—for if so, I should never again dare look my uncle in the face. He is a man of the strictest probity and the utmost rectitude of principle; while on the other hand he comprehends nothing of such love as we experience for each other. Therefore his anger against me would be all the greater?"

"I feel convinced that Mr. Hargrave will say nothing to your uncle upon the subject," replied Gustavus. "He has evidently left the entire matter in my hands. If he had meant to pursue any special course of his own, would he not have brought the box of gold hither and restored it to me in the presence of Mr. Pinnock, at the same time revealing all he knew in reference to yourself, so as the more effectually to cover you, my poor Emily, with shame? But no, sir, Hargrave has not thus acted. He looks upon it as my business—and mine only; and so will he leave it. I do not hesitate to tell you that I shall for ever forfeit the esteem of that strange man who has shown me such goodness; but, ah! Emily," added the youth with a sigh, "there are many, many sacrifices to be made for the sake of love!"

"Yes—many, many sacrifices," murmured the quadroon, winding her arms about her lover's neck. "And now tell me, Gustavus, is it necessary at all—is it absolutely needful that my uncle should be informed of the recovery of the gold?"

The youth reflected for a few moments; and then he exclaimed "No! it were better to keep the secret altogether than to entangle ourselves in a web of artifices and deceptions."

If I were to tell him that I found the box buried in the garden, he would not believe the tale; it would naturally strike him that no person having incurred the risk of a burglary for the sake of the treasure, would forthwith bury it in the garden of the very house where the deed was perpetrated. And then, too, he would ask me how I came to dig so as to discover it?—whether it were the result of information received or of accident? It would be necessary to devise a thousand falsehoods; and the wilful telling thereof would be worse as well as more dangerous than the mere suppression of the fact that the box is recovered.”

Emily was only too glad to support the reasoning of her lover, and to encourage him in the conclusions to which he had just arrived.

Fortunately for their project none of the labourers on the estate and none of the domestics of Mount Pleasant had seen him passing along with the box on his shoulder; and consequently he felt certain there was nothing to fear on this score.

Gustavus now hastened up to his chamber with the box; and he once more secured it in the cupboard whence it had been abstracted.

“I will take an early opportunity,” he said to himself, “of transmitting this treasure to England by some secret and secure means. But as for my own voyage thither—that is no longer to be thought of! It seems written in the book of destiny itself that I shall remain altogether here with my beloved and beautiful Emily!”

Though Gustavus had so positively proclaimed his conviction that Mr. Hargrave would say nothing upon the subject to Mr. Pinnock, yet he could not prevent certain doubts and misgivings on the point from floating in his mind.

He therefore resolved to see Mr. Hargrave as soon as possible, and to explain to him that he had consulted his happiness by pardoning Emily.

The youth liked as little as possible the idea of having to confront the misanthrope with such a tale: but he saw that it was absolutely necessary, and he nerved himself to swallow the bitter pill.

Accordingly, on the ensuing day—during those sultry hours when Emily was wont to remain indoors—Gustavus proceeded to the seashore where on former occasions he had met the misanthrope.

But Mr. Hargrave did not make his appearance; and the youth, after vainly tarrying for some time, proceeded in the direction of the cottage.

He found Mr. Hargrave at home, seated in the parlour where their interview of the preceding day had taken place. He was employed in writing: but the instant Gustavus crossed the threshold of the little room, he threw down his pen and surveyed him with keenest attention. Indeed there was a certain mistrust immediately expressed in Mr. Hargrave's look; and this rapidly increased in proportion as young Barrington's confusion became the more evident.

“I did not expect to see you before to-morrow when the vessel takes its departure for England,” said the misanthrope.

“You will think me very foolish, sir,” faltered Gustavus, colouring deeply; “but—but—I have changed my mind—”

“Oh,” said Mr. Hargrave drily, “I have no

right to think upon the subject at all: and there is no need why I should trouble myself with your vacillations.”

“Certainly not, Mr. Hargrave,” rejoined the youth, stammering and blushing still more than at first. “But I thought—after everything that had taken place—”

“Now, the truth is,” exclaimed the misanthrope, starting up from his seat, “you are a love-sick boy, and you have suffered yourself to be cajoled by Emily Pinnock's wiles. Well, you are not the only one of your sex who has betrayed this weakness. Woman is at the bottom of every mischief in the world; and how could I have hoped that you could prove yourself an exception illustrating strength and fortitude? You are not a Samson; and therefore an Emily Pinnock, with considerably less than a Dalilah's fascinations, could, I have no doubt, easily beguile you.”

There was an exceeding bitterness in Mr. Hargrave's accents as well as in his language, though his tone was also coldly contemptuous. Gustavus smarted and writhed under the terrible infliction: he was full of confusion—he knew not what to say.

“And so you have doubtless abandoned your intention to convey that gold to your aged grandsire who has been twenty-five years in prison, and to your cousin Winifred—the poor orphan who is heaven knows how friendless! These were your own words—eh?—of two or three days ago?”—and now the expression of the misanthrope's countenance was both stern and contemptuous.

“I will send them that gold!” exclaimed the youth, with difficulty keeping back the tears that started to the very brims of his eyes. “Oh! not for a single instant was I so selfish as to think of keeping it for myself! And if, Mr. Hargrave, you would only do me one last act of kindness—if you yourself would favour me by sending the gold—”

“I?” ejaculated the misanthrope: “and why should I send it? But of course I can answer the question myself:—then gazing with stern steadiness upon the youth, he added, “You have concealed from Mr. Pinnock the fact of the restoration of this gold!”

“Yes—for Emily's sake. Oh, I love her, Mr. Hargrave!—and if you only knew her better—”

“I know her well enough, judging from the influence which she seems to have acquired over you.”

“You speak strongly, sir,” said Gustavus, now becoming somewhat indignant at the tone adopted by Mr. Hargrave in respect to the well-beloved quadron. “But I hope and entreat that you will make to her father's ears no revelation which may in any way prejudice that gentleman against her?”

“You may rest assured,” answered the misanthrope, “that I shall interfere no further in your affairs. Pursue your own course. I was a fool for attempting to influence it with a good purpose. Years and years have elapsed since I took an interest in any human being; and thus, on the very first occasion that I take a forward step which I deem calculated to bring me nearer to my fellow-creatures, I am rudely hurled back again into the depth of cynicism, disappointment, and apathy.”

“For God's sake do not believe that I am ungrateful!” cried Gustavus, infinitely pained by the bitter language of one whose friendship he had so much esteemed.

“Enough! Leave me!” ejaculated Mr. Har-

grave: and he imperiously waved his hand towards the door.

"No—we cannot part thus!" said Gustavus in an anguished tone.

"Leave me, I say!" exclaimed the misanthrope authoritatively: and he at once resumed his writing.

Gustavus lingered for a few moments: then with a profound sigh he turned and issued from the room.

Slowly did he wend his way back towards Mount Pleasant; and it was not until again in the society of his beloved Emily that he could console himself for the exceedingly unpleasant nature of this last interview with Mr. Hargrave.

Several days passed: the youth continued to be as infatuated as ever with the beautiful quadroom, who studied her utmost to indemnify him by her own caresses and proofs of love, for whatsoever vexations he might have undergone.

Mr. Pinnock remained in profound ignorance of the discovery of the box: he, however, frequently alluded to it; and on those occasions Gustavus felt as if he must throw himself at the merchant's feet and confess the entire truth. But he dissembled his emotions, though it cost his conscience a bitter pang as the conviction was forced upon him that he was daily and hourly losing more and more of the natural frankness of his disposition, and was proportionately becoming experienced in the artifices of hypocrisy.

As for the box itself, it remained in the cupboard where it was concealed; for Gustavus found no means of conveying it secretly to a ship that it might be forwarded to England. During these few days which thus elapsed since his last interview with Mr. Hargrave, he did not again see that gentleman.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BRIDAL DAY.

It soon became known in the neighbourhood that Gustavus Barrington was shortly to conduct Miss Pinnock to the altar; and many of the leading families called at Mount Pleasant to pay their civilities towards the young couple, as well as to form the acquaintance of the bridegroom himself. Gustavus was pleased with the attentions thus shown him: he was likewise proud of the admiration which was invariably testified in homage of the beauty of his intended. Mr. Pinnock treated him as if he had known him from his birth: indeed the worthy merchant displayed towards the youth a paternal attachment. The preparations for the bridal were making progress: and Gustavus looked forward with pleasure to the day which would give Emily the title of his wife.

But did he write to his cousin and uncle in England, to acquaint them with his contemplated marriage? No—he dared not. Amongst the few little drawbacks to his happiness, was the idea that Winifred would regard that marriage of his as an inconstancy towards herself, and that both she and the old man would consider he had abandoned them by settling himself in a far-off clime.

Each day did he vow to take some step in order to transmit the box of gold to his relatives, as the best proof he could afford that he had not forgotten them, and as a salve likewise

to his own conscience in respect to Winifred. But something always transpired to prevent him from adopting that course. His walk with Emily was prolonged—or visitors arrived to offer their congratulations on the approaching bridal—or else (which was indeed the main obstacle) the youth knew not how to convey the box into Kingston and ship it on board a vessel, without attracting some notice or exciting some suspicion.

At length, as Gustavus was one day rambling forth alone, he suddenly encountered Mr. Hargrave. At first he stood full of confusion; and the misanthrope himself did not immediately speak.

"I have not seen you, sir, for ten days," said Gustavus, at last breaking that embarrassing silence.

"I suppose that I have not chanced to walk in the same spots whither your footsteps led you," responded Mr. Hargrave drily; "but if you had really wished to see me, you might have sought me at my residence."

"I was fearful—after our last interview," faltered Gustavus, "that I had so sunk in your estimation—"

"We will not discuss past matters again," interrupted the misanthrope. "You have forgiven Emily Pinnock—you are going to marry her—the preparations are making for your bridal—and as you cannot now in honour retreat from your pledge, neither should I attempt to dissuade you from the engagement. But what have you done with the gold?"

"Ah, my dear sir!" ejaculated Gustavus, "I am now as much embarrassed with that treasure as if I had dishonestly become possessed of it!"

"Of course you are! How could it possibly be otherwise?" demanded Mr. Hargrave. "But in this instance I am willing to assist you—for the sake of your grandfather and your cousin who may be suffering the pangs of poverty in England."

"Oh, if you will do this," cried Gustavus, "you know not how infinitely I shall be obliged to you, and what a weight will be lifted from my mind!"

"'Tis well," said the misanthrope: "I have promised to succour you—and I will do so. This night, precisely at twelve o'clock, I will send a trustworthy person to receive the box. At that hour he shall be under your command: you will be in readiness—and you will lower down the box by a rope. By the adoption of these precautions no one in the house besides yourself need be aware of what is being done. To-morrow the box shall be shipped at Kingston for conveyance to England;—and to-morrow likewise you can write your letters of advice to your grandfather and your cousin."

"In every respect you are a friend to me!" exclaimed Gustavus, seizing the misanthrope's hand and pressing it with fervour. "Oh, my dear sir, think not ill of me—"

"Enough!" interrupted Mr. Hargrave, somewhat abruptly withdrawing his hand. "Ah! by the bye," he continued, "you remember that the other day when you purposed to leave Jamaica, I told you I should have a letter to send by you to England. I will give you that letter to-morrow—and you shall enclose it in the one which you are to write to your grandfather. Do not be surprised when you find that it is addressed to old Mr. Barrington himself—"

"To my grandfather?" ejaculated Gustavus, in astonishment.

"Yes," rejoined Mr. Hargrave. "But you need not be afraid that I purpose to make any representation at all prejudicial to yourself. Such is not my object—but the humour has taken me to sympathise with the poor old gentleman."

"Oh, this is indeed good of you!" cried Gustavus. "Obligation after obligation do you lay me under!"

"To-night, at twelve o'clock precisely, be upon the look out!" said Mr. Hargrave curtly; and he then hastened away, as though unwilling to prolong the interview.

This scene took place in a road bordered on one side by a dense line of trees; and at the very instant that the misanthrope hurried off, as just stated, it struck Gustavus that he not merely heard a slight rustling amongst those trees at a little distance, but he felt almost certain that he likewise caught a glimpse of a human form.

He at once sped in that direction; he plunged amidst the trees—but he beheld no one. He looked everywhere about—he even examined the ground to ascertain if there were any traces of footsteps: but there was naught to justify his suspicion that a listener had been concealed there.

He returned into the road, and pursued his way towards Mount Pleasant,—where, on being at once joined by Emily, he communicated to her the arrangement he had just made with Mr. Hargrave.

The quadroon had all along been most anxious that the box of gold should be by some means shipped off to England; for so long as it was in the house she never felt entirely safe with regard to her lover—she feared lest at any moment he should alter his mind and insist upon becoming himself the bearer of the treasure to his relations in his native land. Now, therefore, that it was at length to be removed from Mount Pleasant, and that Gustavus dropped no hint of any desire to accompany it, Emily was much rejoiced; and she accordingly expressed her approval of the plan devised by Mr. Hargrave.

Gustavus retired to his chamber at the usual hour—namely, a short time before eleven o'clock; for Mr. Pinnock was wont to keep him with him for some little while after Emily had withdrawn from the sitting-room.

On being alone in his own apartment, Gustavus drew forth the box of gold from the cupboard, and fastened around it the end of a cord which he had taken the precaution of procuring as a means of lowering it from the casement.

The night was somewhat a gloomy one, though there was a sufficient glimmering to show objects that were near.

Gustavus wondered who was the trustworthy person that Mr. Hargrave purposed to send to receive the treasure: but after a moment's reflection he concluded that the individual must be Sambo, the old negro who attended upon him.

Then Gustavus began to wonder what the misanthrope intended to write to his old grandfather in London: but he was by no means uneasy on the point, for he felt convinced that Mr. Hargrave was a man of his word, and he had promised not to make any representation which might prejudice the youth in the opinion of his relatives.

In these and other reflections, with which the image of the beautiful quadroon was frequently blended, did Gustavus while away the time until

his watch showed that it was close upon the midnight hour.

He then bethought himself that it would be better to extinguish his light; for if any one should happen to be passing in the neighbourhood of the villa at the time when the box was being lowered from the casement, the proceeding would stand all the greater chance of being observed if the taper were kept burning. He therefore extinguished it; and estimating as well as he was able the minutes which had to elapse until midnight, he at length noiselessly opened the casement.

Almost at the same moment his ear caught the sound of a slight rustling amidst the adjacent trees; and this sound was followed by the light and stealthy tread of cautiously advancing footsteps.

A figure stopped underneath the window: but it was too dark for Gustavus to recognise the individual.

The box was in readiness: the youth lifted it—he was on the very point of placing it on the window-sill in order to be thence lowered by the rope, when the silent air was suddenly broken upon by the report of a pistol, instantaneously followed by a second.

A cry of mortal agony rang forth from beneath young Barrington's casement; and this was immediately followed by the heavy fall of a human form.

Though with hair standing on end and blood curdling with horror, yet Gustavus mechanically deposited the box upon the floor; and then thrusting forth his head from the casement, he exclaimed,—

"Good heavens! what is the matter?—what has happened?"

He thus spoke because he at the instant beheld a couple of men hurrying through the garden towards the spot where the individual lay beneath the window; and one of those men carried a lantern, which thus revealed their forms to the youth.

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Barrington!" exclaimed a voice, which the youth at once recognised to be that of an upper servant, or bailiff, belonging to the domain of Mount Pleasant. "it is only a robber who is very rightly served."

"A robber?" ejaculated Gustavus, in accents of wild horror: for he fancied that it was the faithful and inoffensive negro attached to the service of Mr. Hargrave who had thus met a violent death.

Indeed, in the frenzy of his harrowed feelings, the youth was on the very point of giving vent to exclamations that would have at least excited suspicion, if not actually betrayed something in connexion with his own arrangement for that particular hour,—when a gentle hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a sweet voice said in his ear,—

"Hush!"

Emily was standing behind him; and he at once turned towards her.

"For heaven's sake beware how you betray everything!" whispered the quadroon hurriedly: and the youth now saw that she was only partially dressed.

"But murder has been committed!—a hideous murder!" he ejaculated, though in a subdued tone—"the murder of a faithful and trustworthy person—"

"Lush! hush!" said the quadroon, in an agony of terror. "They are behind the window—they will hear you—"

"And by heaven they may hear me, Emily—"

for the truth must be told!" rejoined Gustavus, quivering with horror at the deed which had been consummated. "His death lies at my door!" he continued. "His blood will be upon my head!"

"Tell everything if you will, Gustavus," said the quadron: "but remember that if a single syllable of disclosure be made in respect to the gold, everything must come out—and what will then be thought of me?"

"But still—but still, Emily," said Gustavus, "there are considerations beyond all others—"

"Ah! what is that I hear?" suddenly ejaculated the quadron. "Nelson! Is it possible?"

"Nelson!" echoed Gustavus: and he again looked forth from the casement.

The bailiff and his companion were now bending over the corpse—for the wretched man was indeed dead; and the light of the lantern was streaming full upon his countenance.

"Yes—it is Nelson—Mr. Thurlow's nigger," said the bailiff, in a loud voice. "A prettyascal!"

"Perhaps he stole the young gentleman's gold after all?" remarked the bailiff's companion: "and was coming on a second expedition—"

"Nelson, do you say?" cried Mr. Pinnoek, who clad in a dressing gown, now rushed out of the back door of the house.

"Then you need say nothing, Gustavus!" whispered the quadron; "for the wretch has only most deservedly and righteously met his fate."

"Ah!" ejaculated Gustavus, as he again turned towards Emily: "I remember that rustling among the trees—this glimpse which I fancied I caught of a form! Retire to your room, dear Emily!—rest assured that I will say nothing that shall be calculated to compromise you!"

A hastily snatched embrace, and the quadron glided away.

Gustavus, again thrusting his head from the casement, exclaimed,—

"Have I indeed heard aright?—is it Nelson who is killed?"

"Yes, and no other, my boy," replied Mr. Pinnoek. "I am sorry you should have been so alarmed—I hope some of the women have gone to poor Emily—for the report of the pistols were sufficient to send her off into a swoon."

"Do not be alarmed on my account, dear uncle," said the young lady, now speaking from her own casement; "though I have indeed been terribly frightened!"

"Get to bed a nin, my dear," ejaculated the merchant; "it is only a villain, who after all has met his righteous doom."

Several domestics of the household had by this time followed their master to the spot; and Gustavus lost no time in transferring the box of gold back into the cupboard, whence he had just taken it.

Having secured it there, he sped down stairs and joined the group, to whom the bailiff was just explaining how the affair had happened.

"Why, you see," he said, "it being the turn of me and my mate here to watch the premises to-night—"

"You must know, Gustavus," interrupted Mr. Pinnoek, "that ever since the mysterious robbery of your gold I have ordered the premises to be watched though certainly until to-night I

fancied it was very much like shutting the stable-door after the steed was stolen. But go on, Jackson."

"As I was saying, sir," continued the bailiff, to whom this mandate was addressed, "I and my mate were coming through the plantation yonder, just this side of the wooden bridge, when through the obscurity of the night we saw some one cross that bridge: and so we kept watch at a suitable distance. We traced him to the garden fence; and then we lost sight of him. So said I to my mate, 'He's over the fence into the garden, I'll be bound!'—And my mate said the same. Then we crept along till at last, sure enough! we saw the fellow just upon the spot where he now lies. Crack went my pistol—and, almost immediately afterwards, crack went my mate's!"

"And that's all," added Mr. Pinnoek; "for the result is before us! Now move the corpse to an outhouse, and let information be given to Mr. Thurlow as well as to the coroner the very first thing in the morning. Come, let's be off to our chambers again: there cannot be the slightest necessity for us to lose our needful rest for the sake of a villanous wretch such as this!"

The dead body was accordingly borne away to an outhouse: Mr. Pinnoek, Gustavus, and the domestics ascended to their respective apartments again.

But Gustavus could not sleep: the image of of the slain negro haunted him. It was not that he had any remorse, compunction, or regret on Nelson's account; for it was only too evident that by some means or another the villanous negro had taken the place of the trustworthy messenger whom Mr. Hargrave had purposed to send to receive the box of gold.

But still Gustavus was by nature so merciful and so averse to the shedding of human blood, that he could not help experiencing a certain species of superstitious awe and horror, as in the darkness of his chamber he reflected on the scene which had just occurred. Towards morning a feverish sleep came over him; and in that restless slumber he continued to behold the image of the slain negro.

He rose at an early hour and at once set off to Mr. Hargrave's cottage. At the very instant that he entered the little garden in which it stood, the misanthrope was coming forth from his front door.

"What brings you hither so early?" inquired Mr. Hargrave. "You look pale and ill. Has anything happened?—has anything gone wrong? Did not the affair of last night go off successfully?"

"In the name of God, Mr. Hargrave," exclaimed the youth, "whom did you trust to fetch the box?"

"Whom should I trust but my faithful old Sambo, who never speaks unless he is spoken to, and who has no more idea of idle gossiping than a child of a twelvemonth old? But what has happened?"

"Sambo never came," responded Gustavus; "some one else came in his stead—"

"What! Sambo idle or treacherous!" exclaimed Mr. Hargrave.

"Ah! that remains to be discovered," returned Gustavus. "But he who came in his stead was Nelson."

"Nelson?" ejaculated the misanthrope in dismay. "And you gave him the gold?"

"Accursed gold!" cried the youth vehemently: "it has produced nothing but perplexity, vexation, double dealing, and horror

throughout! Accursed gold, I say! But who could have hoped that a miser's gold would bring anything to its possessor but trouble and ill luck?"

"Ah! you have not been to sea," said Mr. Hargrave, in a tone that was slightly contemptuous, "without becoming imbued with the superstition of sailors! And now will you please to explain to me everything that has happened?"

"Mount Pleasant has been watched by Mr. Pinnock's people ever since the loss of the gold," replied Gustavus; "and of that fact I was ignorant. In a word, Nelson is dead—the watchmen shot him as a robber!"

"And serve him right!" said Mr. Hargrave; "for though I cannot understand how he took Sambo's place, yet the motive was clear enough. I suppose that there is now a tremendous sensation at Mount Pleasant—everything is known!"

"Nothing is known!" rejoined Gustavus. "When I parted from you yesterday I had reason to believe that there had been an unseen listener to our conversation in the road; and therefore when the terrible catastrophe happened last night, I at once comprehended that this listener could have been none other than Nelson."

"Then it only remains for us to question Sambo," said Mr. Hargrave. "But when I bethink me, the old man will be frightened by your presence. Do you remain here—or walk into my cottage—while I go to his but—that is to say, if he is there, and if Nelson has not murdered him."

Gustavus shuddered at the bare possibility of the realization of the horrible idea; and he walked in the garden while Mr. Hargrave sped to the little hut where Sambo dwelt. He remained there for about ten minutes; and therefore Gustavus was relieved from his apprehension that Sambo had been made away with.

At the expiration of that interval Mr. Hargrave reappeared from his servant's hut; and young Barrington immediately hastened to meet him.

"That villain Nelson," said Mr. Hargrave, "overreached himself at last. I have got it all out of poor Sambo. But first I must tell you that after I left you yesterday, I went into Kingston to give notice to the captain of a ship that it was very probable a box containing mineral specimens would be consigned to his charge this morning. Then I returned to my cottage; and it was between nine and ten o'clock, just before I retired to rest, that I gave Sambo his instructions. But it now appears that as Sambo was making his way towards Mount Pleasant between eleven and twelve last night, he met Nelson, who seemed to be coming towards him in a very great hurry. 'Ah!' said Nelson, 'it is fortunate I have met you; for I was just running across to your hut to tell you that you are not to come to-night. Mr. Barrington has sent me with the message: there is a party at Mount Pleasant; he will not be able to get away from the drawing-room to do the business; and besides, all the servants will be about.'—Sambo naturally believed the truth of this message, delivered as it was by one who evidently possessed so intimate an acquaintance with the transaction that was in hand. He accordingly retraced his way to his hut, little dreaming how the villain of Nelson had proved the means of saving his life: for if it had been otherwise, and if Sambo had been suffered to continue in the performance of the

duty entrusted to him, he would have assuredly perished by the same pistol shots which stretched Nelson a corpse beneath your window."

"Yes—it was heaven's own retribution against the villainous Nelson!" said Gustavus. "And now, Mr. Hargrave, will it be necessary at the Coroner's inquest?"

"For us to give any information upon the subject?" exclaimed the misanthrope. "Assuredly not—unless indeed you have altered your mind in respect to Emily, and you are no longer desirous of shielding her from exposure in the matter of the purloining of your gold? For if one thing comes out, everything must of course be explained."

"Oh, my dear sir!" cried the youth, "I am very far from having an inclination for any such exposure!"

"Then say nothing upon the point," rejoined the misanthrope. "We have no qualm of conscience to appease: it is not our fault that the vile negro met his death. He was meditating a robbery—that is only too evident—and as you yourself ere now said, it was heaven's retribution. Mr. Pinnock had a right to have his grounds watched; and the watchers had a right to shoot any one whom they caught stealthily lurking there for an improper purpose. I may think myself very fortunate that when I stole into the grounds the other night to hunt after the box of buried gold, I did not get my brains blown out by the watchmen. It must have been a narrow escape for me, you see, Gustavus—for I had not the remotest suspicion that the premises were being actually watched. However, let that matter pass—and now to return to our former topic. The proceedings at the inquest will be but a formality—an affair of but five minutes—and in two or three days the matter will be no more thought of."

Gustavus now took his leave of Mr. Hargrave, and at once hastened back to Mount Pleasant.

In the garden he met Emily, who was exceedingly anxious and uneasy at not having found him there as usual when she descended from her own chamber; for she dreaded lest some compunctious feeling on his part, or else advice on Mr. Hargrave's, should lead to a full revelation of all the circumstances which had led to the catastrophe.

The quodroon was therefore rejoiced when on encountering him, she observed that his features were placid and unruffled; and she was still more completely relieved when he informed her of the particulars of his interview with Mr. Hargrave.

In the course of the day an inquest was holden upon the corpse of Nelson; and as the misanthrope had predicted, it was a mere formality.

The two watchmen gave their evidence; and the jury returned a verdict in accordance therewith.

Gustavus was well pleased that the affair had passed off thus tranquilly; while the quodroon was not only delighted on that account, but also because the very man who could tell an evil tale concerning her—how he had seen her one night at the easement of Barrington's room—existed upon the earth no longer.

In respect to the box of gold, Gustavus ceased to entertain a superstitious notion—which indeed was only momentary at the time—concerning it; and he was resolved to adopt some prompt measure, unattended likewise with danger, for its transmission to England. The ready wit of Emily Pinnock now came to his assistance. She sug-



gested that he should purchase numerous heavy articles, such as jars of pickles and preserves, under pretence of sending them as a present to his friends in England. This course was adopted: the box of gold was placed in the middle of a much larger packing case, all the remaining portion being closely filled up with hay; and in this condition the case weighed no heavier than if it had actually been filled with the demijohns of pickles and the jars of preserves. It was duly shipped, Mr. Pinnock himself becoming the unconscious agent of the removal of the very box of gold the supposed loss of which he continued so much to deplore. As for the jars which Gustavus and Emily had been careful in not packing in the case at all, they were stowed away in a cupboard in the quadroom's chamber, and of which she possessed the key.

A few more days elapsed—and the one fixed for the bridal at length dawned. It was a bright

beautiful day, in the early part of November; and everything now seemed to smile auspiciously upon the approaching union of the lovers. Gustavus was indeed completely happy; for he would not now permit even a single thought relative to Winifred to mar his felicity. He had sent her his treasure, and he thought he had done enough by enriching her. Need we say that Emily experienced a degree of happiness which could not be excelled by the feeling of any other heart? And eminently beautiful did she appear, when in her bridal raiment she entered the drawing-room where Gustavus, who was himself handsomely dressed, hastened forward to receive her. Mr. Pinnock was likewise there—as were also the two bride's-maids. These were the daughters of a neighbouring planter, named Adair, and of considerable wealth. Two or three other guests were expected to arrive in order to be present at the holy ceremony; and afterwards the number was

to be swelled into a numerous company for the wedding breakfast. There was to be no departure elsewhere for the honeymoon,—this custom being but little practised amongst the dwellers in that hot climate where travelling was avoided as much as possible.

We have already said that Emily Pinnoek looked very beautiful; and we may now observe that her natural charms were enhanced by the exquisite taste of her becoming toilet. Her countenance was animated with happiness—the rich carnation mantled beneath her transparent brunette skin—and her eyes, so large and handsome, shone with a kindred lustre. The young bridegroom seemed in every way well worthy of that beautiful bride. He was dressed handsomely and elegantly, the costume setting off his slender well-shaped figure to the utmost advantage. His countenance likewise beamed with pleasure and delight; and he gazed with mingled pride and fondness upon the beautiful quadron as she clung lovingly to his arm.

There were yet, as we have said, other guests to be awaited; and there was still more than half-an-hour to intervene before the carriages would arrive to take the bridal party into Kingston, where the holy ceremony was to be performed. Indeed, it was now only a little past ten o'clock in the forenoon; but the bride as well as the bridesmaids had their bonnets on and were in perfect readiness to set out when the proper moment should come.

"I hope the Miss Thurlows and their father will not keep us waiting," said Mr. Pinnoek, looking at his watch. "There is however little fear of that; for my friend Thurlow is always punctual in his appointments as well as with his payments."

"And I saw Jene Thurlow last evening," said the elder Miss Adair; "and she assured me that her father, herself, and her sister would be here by half past ten at the latest."

"And Mr. Adair?" inquired Mr. Pinnoek: "he left you to come alone—eh?"

"I have already told you, Mr. Pinnoek," responded Miss Adair, "that he was compelled to drive into Kingston after setting us down at Mount Pleasant; for you know that a mail-steamer leaves for England at noon; and my father——"

"Oh, to be sure!" ejaculated Mr. Pinnoek; "business must be attended to; and your father would not be the rich man that he is if he had ever neglected his affairs. But you said that he would be here presently?"

"He had merely some instructions to give to his head clerk," replied Miss Adair; "and I know that having done this he will at once drive hither without delay."

"Here he comes!" ejaculated Mr. Pinnoek, who from the drawing-room easement had just caught sight of Mr. Adair's carriage approaching up the avenue.

In a few minutes Mr. Adair had joined the bridal party. He warmly greeted Gustavus, to whom he had taken a liking although their acquaintance was so brief; and he addressed Emily with a kind of friendly familiarity, for he had known her from her childhood. He then turned to converse with Mr. Pinnoek, while the two Miss

Adairs joined Gustavus and Emily at the farther extremity of the apartment.

"No particular news from England by the mail that came in yesterday," said Mr. Adair. "Everything is quiet there,—though on the Continent of Europe things continue to be very much unsettled;"—for my readers will bear in mind that these scenes which we are relating occurred at the close of the memorable revolutionary year 1848.

"I had so many letters by yesterday's mail," said Mr. Pinnoek, "that I really had not time to look over the newspapers, beyond glancing at the Markets and the Money Articles; and then I forgot to bring the newspapers home with me from my office last evening. Not however that I suppose I should have read much of them; for what with the preparations for to-day's ceremony——"

"To be sure! to be sure!" ejaculated Mr. Adair; "your time has been thoroughly occupied. Nor on my part did I find much leisure to look over what may be termed the English domestic news—though, by the bye, I recollect reading something about a murder which has been committed in London and which appears to have produced a very great sensation."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Pinnoek. "But for my part I seldom take the trouble to read such narratives."

"Nor I as a rule," rejoined Mr. Adair. "Indeed, if you were to ask me to give you an accurate sketch of this particular case to which I am alluding, I do not think that I could perform the task. However, it seems that a young girl—I forget her name—was arrested upwards of a month back on a charge of murdering some old lady of no very excellent character. It took place in the neighbourhood of St. John's Wood——"

"Only listen to papa!" said the eldest Miss Adair, in a subdued tone to her sister, Gustavus, and Emily: "how can he think of talking of such horrible things on an occasion when nothing but the most cheerful topics ought to enter into the discourse!"

"Oh, leave them to themselves, my dear sister!" said the younger Miss Adair. "When they have finished their present subject, they will talk of the prices of sugar, and ginger, and so forth, until the carriages arrive."

"And what is the name of this young murderer of whom you are speaking?" asked Mr. Pinnoek, in a careless conversational way, as he remained at the other extremity of the room with his friend Mr. Adair.

"Well, I really forget," replied the latter gentleman. "I have the worst head in the world for remembering names—unless they are connected with business," he added with a smile; "and yet I recollect, when glancing over the London newspapers last night, there was something in the girl's name which struck me with the force of a coincidence; but I can't for the life of me now call to mind what it was. However, it is of no consequence—though, as I just now said, the crime seems to have created great excitement in the British metropolis. The accused young female appears to be very interesting and prepossessing——"

"Of course!" ejaculated Mr. Pinnoek: "all

young ladies who commit a crime are sure to be described as interesting. It is just the same with our own Jamaica newspapers as with the English ones. The public everywhere have a morbid taste in these matters; and the press panders to it. Perhaps," added Mr. Pincock, with a smile, "the old lady whom the girl murdered, was likewise a very interesting person?"

"No, no—I didn't tell you that!" ejaculated Mr. Adair, laughing. "On the contrary, if I recollect aright, she is represented as being a woman of bad character; and this renders the affair all the more mysterious—because, according to what I read, it seems unaccountable that a girl who had previously borne such an irreproachable character as the accused, could have had any connexion with the old wretch who has been assassinated."

"Do for heaven's sake, my dear papa," exclaimed the elder Miss Adair, "discourse upon something else!—for we cannot help overhearing what you say, and it is perfectly horrible to broach such topics on such an occasion as the present!"

"I have got no more to say upon the subject, my dear," responded Mr. Adair, smiling. "Ah! here are the Thurlows!"

Mr. Pincock hastened from the apartment to welcome the new-comers, who were speedily introduced to the drawing-room. These were Mr. Thurlow and his two daughters; and the usual greetings were exchanged. The two Miss Thurlows ascended to Emily's bed-chamber to make some little amendment to the toilet which had been rumpled in the carriage that had brought them; and Mr. Pincock, with true West Indian hospitality, proposed to Mr. Adair and to Mr. Thurlow to take some little refreshment previous to setting off into Kingston. For this purpose those three gentlemen adjourned to the breakfast-parlour where the refreshments were spread; so that the bride and bridegroom now remained alone with the two Miss Adairs.

"If I had chosen," said the younger Miss Adair, "I could have refreshed my papa's memory with regard to the recent topic of his discourse: for I glanced over the London *Times* last evening, and I read some particulars concerning the crime. In the first place I recollect the date: it was the fifth of October."

"The fifth of October?" ejaculated Gustavus, with a sudden start.

"What is the matter?" inquired Emily, who perceived his emotion.

"Oh, nothing! nothing!" he hastily responded, as he instantaneously recovered himself.

"Now I insist," said the elder Miss Adair, "that we do not take up a topic which I just now so much deprecated when my father and Mr. Pincock were discoursing on it."

"No—certainly not!" said Emily: "it is painful and horrible!"

"Yes—painful and horrible," repeated Gustavus, scarcely however knowing what he said: for though his countenance was now calm, his mind was strangely agitated.

The *fifth of October* was a date which he had for some time ceased to recollect with any degree of significance; but now it had been suddenly recalled to his memory. His thoughts were reflected back to that day when on board the Catharine Millard he found himself haunted by

some vague presentiment which he could not shake off, and which indeed had grown upon him with such a superstitious power at the time that he had said to himself, "*The fifth of October!* I shall not forget it!"

And now, as this date was so vividly brought back to his memory, a cloud of other ideas and associations came sweeping in unto his mind. He recollected how, when on board the Catharine Millard, and under the influence of that evil presentiment, he had been smitten with vague apprehensions lest anything should be occurring at that particular moment to his relatives in England. He felt that he had then cared for those relatives far more than he had recently done; and he was smitten with a feeling of remorse at the idea of having now for ever cut himself off, as it were, from those whom but a month back he would not for the world have thought of abandoning. No wonder, therefore, was it that at this moment his conduct towards Winifred should suddenly assume the aspect of a perfidy, and that though he had never actually breathed in his cousin's ears the language of love, yet that he was proving faithless to that species of tacit understanding of constancy and fidelity which had existed between them at the time when he left England. Thus, altogether, a sudden damp was thrown upon the young bridegroom's spirits; and he felt as if he were standing upon the threshold of the perpetration of a crime.

At this juncture Mr. Pincock returned to the drawing-room; and as he flung a package of newspapers upon the table, he exclaimed, "Come! we must be upon the alert! The carriage will be here in a few minutes!"

"What have you got there?" inquired Gustavus, starting up from his seat and saying the first thing that came into his head in the hope of turning his ideas into some new channel.

"Oh! it is nothing but a packet of London newspapers which Mr. Thurlow has just given me," responded Mr. Pincock.

"Ah, London newspapers!" ejaculated Gustavus, who felt himself irresistibly impelled by his gloomy presentiments to glance at those journals.

Be it borne in mind that it was the younger Miss Adair who had happened to mention that she glanced over the newspapers on the preceding evening; and it was she who had mentioned that date of the *fifth of October* which suddenly produced such an effect upon the bridegroom. She noticed that there was something strange—her recollection was quickened—she was suddenly struck by that very coincidence to which her father himself had ere now vaguely alluded while talking to Mr. Pincock; and she hastily whispered to Emily, "It is strange—most strange!—but the name of the young English murderess is also Barrington—Winifred Barrington!"

A deadly pallor instantaneously overspread Emily's countenance,—a pallor the ghastliness of which might be seen through her brunette complexion; and Mr. Adair's two daughters were now seized with a wild affright. At the same time a terrific cry burst forth from the lips of Gustavus, who had just opened the packet of newspapers and had glanced rapidly over the first which came to hand. There his eyes at once set-

tled upon the words "MYSTERIOUS MURDER AT ST. JOHN'S WOOD:" and glancing down the column, he beheld the name of *Winifred Barrington*!

All was now confusion, consternation, and dismay in that drawing-room. Gustavus had sunk in horror upon a chair, the newspaper dropping from his hand; while Emily, springing towards him, threw her arms about his neck, exclaiming wildly, "No, no! it is impossible!—it must be some fearful mistake!"

"Good heavens, Gustavus! what is the matter, my dear boy?" cried Mr. Pincock, who understood nothing of the cause of this strange and alarming scene.

As for the two bridesmaids, they were likewise seized with consternation, which was blended with horror, because they *did* suspect something of the actual truth.

"She is innocent! she is innocent!" exclaimed Gustavus wildly: and in his fearful excitement he pushed Emily away from him. "What! Winifred a murderess? No—impossible! But it is for me to make her innocence apparent!"

With these words, uttered in accents of the most thrilling excitement, Gustavus sprang from his seat, and he rushed from the room. Cries burst from the lips of the bride and the bridesmaids, while Mr. Pincock bounded after the fugitive bridegroom. Upon the landing Gustavus met the two Miss Thurlows, who were just descending from the chamber where they had been amending their toilet; and he dashed madly past them. On the stairs he encountered Mr. Adair and Mr. Thurlow, who were ascending from the refreshment-room:—and past them he likewise in frenzy sped. Snatching up his hat in the hall, he darted forth from the house.

Mr. Pincock's phæton was at the door: Gustavus sprang into it—seized the reins—and urged the horses away at their fleetest pace; so that the domestic who was standing close by their heads, had only just time to step aside to save himself from being run over. Towards Kingston drove the half-frenzied youth. The image of Winifred was now uppermost in his mind as that of an angel of innocence unjustly accused; while the image of Emily Pincock was like that of a temptress who had seduced him away from his duty towards the other. For such was the morbid, almost maddened state of his mind, that he was utterly unable to deliberate rationally; and he was labouring under the poignant, anguished impression that everything which had occurred to Winifred might have been avoided but for his perfidy towards her.

In this wildly excited frame of mind Gustavus reached the harbour and sprang from the vehicle. The mail-steamer was at that moment about to start; and in a few seconds he was on board. His agitated appearance—the strange precipitation with which he had sprung upon the deck of the vessel—together with his full-dress costume as a bridegroom, naturally excited a lively sensation on the part of the spectators on the quay and the passengers on board. The captain of the steam-*packet* hastened to accost the youth and to demand an explanation: but Gustavus, tossing his purse towards him, bade him take the passage-money. The captain had nothing more to say:

the youth could pay his fare—no officer of justice appeared to oppose his departure from the island—and he had consequently a right to be on board that vessel. The ropes were on the very point of being cast loose, when a person was seen making his way quickly through the crowd of spectators; and he reached the steam-*packet's* side. He sprang on board, and in a few moments accosted Gustavus Barrington. All who beheld the proceeding, fancied that there was about to be a scene of some kind or another: but they were disappointed. Nothing more than a brief rapid colloquy took place; and this may be described in a few words.

"Ah, Mr. Hargrave! is it you?" ejaculated Gustavus, as that singular individual accosted him.

"And you are going to England?" said the misanthrope; "and I can understand why:—for alas, poor young man! I have just been reading the English newspapers——"

"Oh! is it not dreadful?" exclaimed Gustavus: "and I who was beguiled to remain so long in the island!"

"Give this letter to your grandfather," said Mr. Hargrave. "I had prepared it expressly to send by this *packet*: but little did I think that you yourself would become the bearer of it. Farewell—and may God bless you!"

Mr. Hargrave wrung the youth's hand; and then hastening away, leapt out of the vessel—which he had only just time to do, for the ropes were now cast loose and the huge paddle-wheels were turning. The stately steamer began to move out of the harbour; and now a carriage arrived amidst the spectators on the shore. That carriage belonged to Mr. Thurlow, who was himself in it, as well as Mr. Pincock. The latter was very much excited; and when he found that the steamer had already taken its departure, he exclaimed, "By heaven, we are too late! How can I carry back this intelligence to poor Emily, who is already well-nigh heart-broken!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

AFTER THE TRIAL.

THE scene once more shifts to England; and we return to the Old Bailey, where we left Winifred Barrington at the moment when the emphatic verdict of *Not Guilty* had been delivered by the foreman of the jury. Winifred fainted; and she was at once borne from the dock. The Judge, without passing a single comment upon the verdict which had been returned, ordered that the young girl's discharge from custody should immediately take place; and he was then about to quit the bench, when Mr. Wardour made an application that the ring which had figured as so important an item in the evidence, might be given up to Winifred. The Judge at once complied with his demand; and he then retired. One of the jurymen instantaneously availed himself of the termination of the proceedings to glide out of the box; and he quickly disappeared. This was the one who had held out and who had succeeded in the long run in bringing all the others round to his own opinion. But the eleven other jurymen lin-

gered for a few minutes, and looked at one another as if inquiring whether after all they had done their duty? Indeed, they seemed to be like men awakening from a hallucinating spell which had been cast upon them.

"Who is this Dalham?" at length one of them asked of his companions.

"I do not know; but I of course thought that he must be well known to some of us," was the reply given by another.

Again they looked at each other; and then there was a general confession that each and all were entirely unacquainted with Mr. Dalham, and had never to their knowledge seen him before that day.

"You know," said the foreman, "that it was mentioned two or three times in the course of the trial—and indeed the public prints had before stated—that the girl is the grand-daughter of the old man who is plaintiff in the Chancery suit of '*Barrington versus Dalham*.' But that is Sir John Dalham the Baronet——"

"And he has a son," observed another jurymen. "But surely——"

"Well, it would indeed be odd," said another, "if this very Dalham who has been our colleague and who brought us round to the verdict we have delivered, should either be Sir John's son or any other relation. I remember being struck by the coincidence that a person bearing the name of Dalham should be in the jury-box; but then I thought that the name was by no means an uncommon one."

"But how was he qualified to be on the jury at all?" asked the foreman, whose countenance indicated a growing confusion and mystification the more the matter was discussed, and who also looked as if he fancied that they were now putting amongst themselves those questions which ought to have been asked before.

"I remember very well," said one of the jurymen, "that about three weeks or a month back a small bookselling business in Paternoster Row changed hands, and the name of Dalham displaced that of Simpson over the door. This is doubtless the Dalham who has been acting with us to-day; and if so, he was qualified to sit as a jurymen. At all events the thing is done—whether by some trick or other it is too late for us to inquire: and perhaps for our own sakes the less we say upon the subject the better. For my part I am famishing, and shall get home to supper without further delay."

The other jurors seemed to think this was the best course to be adopted; and they accordingly separated.

In the meanwhile Mr. Dalham—the particular jurymen whose name had just formed the topic of discussion—was hastily wending his way up Ludgate Hill. He speedily reached Paternoster Row; and on arriving in that narrow thoroughfare, he turned into a bookseller's shop over the door of which his own name was conspicuously painted. It was the only shop the door of which was open in the street at that late hour in the evening; but the shutters had been put up. Passing through the shop, Mr. Dalham entered the counting-house at the back; and there his presence awakened an elderly man who was taking a nap in an easy chair by the fireside.

"Well, sir, have you succeeded?" inquired this individual, as he bowed respectfully to Mr. Dalham.

"I have," was the reply: "I have vindicated the cause of innocence unjustly accused. And now, Mr. Simpson, you may have your own name painted over the shop front again to-morrow morning; and I will give you the reward which I promised for your generous complicity in this proceeding."

Thus speaking, Mr. Dalham drew forth his pocket-book; and thence he took a number of bank-notes, which he placed upon the desk.

"I have been a bookseller for three weeks," said Mr. Dalham, with a smile; "and now I retire from business. Your customers, Mr. Simpson, will no doubt think it strange that you return to the establishment again after having ostensibly abandoned it for that short period: but you will know how to keep your own counsel."

"Trust to me, sir," replied the old bookseller, as he took up the bank-notes which Mr. Dalham had placed upon the desk. "I am glad to have been enabled to render you this assistance."

Mr. Dalham then took his departure; and on the following day his name was erased from the shop front.

While this little scene was taking place, a cab was conveying Winifred away from the Old Bailey. She was not alone: she was sustained in the arms of her kind friend Mrs. Slater, who could scarcely restrain within reasonable bounds the joy she experienced at the young girl's acquittal. Winifred—having been with some difficulty recovered from the state of unconsciousness in which she was borne from the dock—was still almost overpowered by her emotions: she felt as if she had been awakened from a long and hideous dream, the crushing influence of which still lingered upon her soul: she could scarcely believe that it was a reality—that she was indeed free—that she was no longer within the horrible walls of Newgate—and that she was seated in that vehicle at liberty to proceed whithersoever she thought fit. Need we inform the reader that the cab was ordered to drive in the first instance to Whitecross Street Prison, that the joyous intelligence of Winifred's acquittal might be without delay communicated to her old grandfather? Such was the case; and on reaching the prison, Mrs. Slater alighted to speak to one of the servants of the Governor; for the gates had long been closed and the turnkeys had taken their departure. The Governor's servant faithfully promised that an immediate communication should be made to old Mr. Barrington; but Winifred could not obtain permission to see him at that late hour. Indeed, she had not entertained the hope; for she full well knew the regulations of the establishment. It was however sufficient for her that her grandfather should be at once put out of all suspense in reference to the result of the trial; and as the cab rolled away from the door of the prison, it was with an indescribable luxury of feeling that she said to herself, "By this time he knows that I am free—and he is happy!"

Mrs. Slater's house was soon reached; and Winifred was once more in her own lodging.

An affecting scene was it on the following morning when the young girl and her old grandfather

met. This interview took place in a room adjoining the entrance-lobby of the prison; for Winifred did not like to penetrate at once into the gaol, where she knew that she should be an object of marked curiosity. Therefore to the room adjoining the lobby was the old man summoned from the infirmary; and there the grandfather and granddaughter were folded in each other's arms. Both wept copiously. There was a childishness in the old man's weeping, in his broken speech, and in his entire manner; and Winifred sobbed so convulsively that it seemed as if her heart were about to burst with a sense of calamity rather than as if it were throbbing with joy at being restored to the arms of the old man whom she loved so tenderly.

"I knew all along how it would end, my dear girl," said the old man, in a whimpering tone: "I knew that you were innocent, and that they would not dare condemn you. But tell me all about it, my sweet Winnie."

"Another time, my dear grandfather," she hastily replied: "let us now speak of yourself. You have been very ill—but you have wanted for nothing. Mrs. Slater has assured me that this was the case; and she told me truly—did she not?"

"Yes, yes, Winnie—I had everything I desired: but that was of no consequence, for I could not be happy as long as I knew that you were in that dreadful place. Ah, my dear Winnie! I have met with a great deal of sympathy. Mrs. Slater has been very kind to me, and has brought me all kinds of nice things. And that young lady too whom you worked for—"

"Miss Evelyn," said Winifred. "Yes—Mrs. Slater told me that Miss Evelyn had sent you several little presents—"

"And then, regularly every Saturday evening," continued the old man, "two guineas were forwarded to me, enclosed in an envelope, and evidently directed in a feigned hand. I can't think from whom the money came—"

"It was some kind friend, dear grandfather, who chose to remain unknown," said Winifred, a slight flush passing across her countenance; for she doubtless knew, or at least suspected who was the author of that anonymously bestowed bounty. "And now tell me," she continued, anxious to keep her grandfather's attention diverted from the circumstances of her trial and acquittal,—"tell me how gets on the lawsuit? Do you still employ Mr. Timperley?"

"Yes—oh, yes," responded old Barrington: "for Timperley has never seemed so sanguine of success as during the last month. Still I think that he might have drawn the affidavits stronger—and there were several points which I had to make him amend: but I think, after all, he is a very worthy man—he expressed so much sympathy on your account, and said how sorry he was the case had been taken out of his hands. By the bye, Winifred, how did that happen? I never could rightly understand it:—and who was it that instructed Mr. Wardour to appear for you?"

"Now pray do me a favour, my dear grandfather," said Winnie; "and do not let us talk or think any more of the dreadful past: let us rejoice in the present, and hope for the future. I am again in my old lodging at worthy Mrs. Slater's—

I am sure I shall not want for friends—I shall obtain as much work as I can possibly accomplish—that dear kind Miss Evelyn will be certain to assist me—and everything will therefore go on just the same as before those terrible things happened to me. I shall come and see you every day; and on the Sunday I shall pass the entire afternoon with you—and you must endeavour to make yourself happy, and not say another word about the misfortunes that I have gone through."

"Well, well, Winnie," said the old man, "I will do everything you tell me. It really seemed as if heaven itself had deserted us all at one time: for poor Gustavus was shipwrecked—"

"Oh, how I wept when I read his letter!" said Winifred, the tears now again gushing from her eyes. "But what a strange coincidence! Almost at the very time that I was arrested on that terrible accusation, was poor Gus enduring all the horrors of shipwreck! The 5th of October for me!—the 6th of October for him!"

"But he has fallen in with a kind friend," interjected the old man: "that Mr. Pinnock of whom he writes, seems to have been as good as a father to him."

"Poor Gustavus!" murmured Winifred: and then she added in a blither tone, "We shall doubtless see him shortly; and then what happiness and joy for us all! Oh, I shudder—I feel horrified at the thought that he will read of all this—Yes, by this time he must know it—and therefore his own feelings—But, ah! I was wrong to revert to painful topics after I had so earnestly entreated that you yourself would abstain from them!"

"Yes, yes, my dear child—we must endeavour to be happy," said the old man; "and we will not talk of the past. God is good to us after all. The life of our dear Gus was saved—your innocence is proved—and this Term will very likely see the successful issue of our tedious lawsuit."

The conversation between the old man and Winifred was long; but the greater portion of it was interesting only to themselves. Mr. Barrington expressed his intention of leaving the infirmary and descending to his ward, so that he might again be amongst his old companions—though he proclaimed his conviction that it would be for no very lengthened period that he should now have to remain in prison, inasmuch as the present Term could not possibly fail to see the issue of his lawsuit.

When Winifred took her departure, she hastened to obtain a copy of the *Times*, which was the newspaper that her grandfather habitually read; and she returned to her lodgings to peruse the account of her trial. She was rejoiced on finding that the name of Dalham was not mentioned as that of one of the jurymen; and indeed nothing was said to lead to the supposition that there had been any special motive at work to influence the jury in their final decision.

Winifred had scarcely terminated the perusal of the report, when the servant of the lodging-house entered her room to announce that a gentleman desired an interview with Miss Barrington. Winifred conjectured who the gentleman was; and she lost no time in descending to Mrs. Slater's parlour, to which the visitor had been shown,—the worthy landlady herself not

being at home at the time. Winnie was right in her supposition—it was Mr. Dalham who was awaiting her presence; and we may here at once observe that he was the personage whom she had met near the neighbourhood of Sidney Villa and whom she had followed into the bye-lane, upon the memorable day of Mrs. Chicklade's murder. We then described him as a man of about forty years of age—of moderate stature—of slim figure—and tolerably good-looking countenance. His hair and whiskers were dark; his profile was aquiline; his eyes were large and piercing. The expression of his countenance indicated strong passions, which, as we have previously said, might be moved either for good or for evil, but which would go to the extreme according to whatsoever impulse they obeyed.

"Winifred," he said, as the young girl made her appearance, "most heartily do I congratulate you on the result of yesterday's proceedings;"—and taking her hand he pressed it fervently.

"But it was to you, Mr. Dalham," she replied, with the accents of strong emotion, "that I was indebted for this result. Oh! how generous and how good has been your conduct towards me! Yee, and to my grandfather likewise!—for I have learnt from his lips sufficient to convince me that every week you have been the anonymous source of bounty towards him."—

"But he suspects it not?" said Roderick Dalham hastily.

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Winifred with vehemence. "Oh, I trembled ere I read the account in the newspaper!"—

"My name, you perceive, was not mentioned," interjected Mr. Dalham. "The accounts in all the morning journals are precisely the same."

"Oh, if your father knew how you have befriended me," cried Winifred, clasping her hands, "the consequences would be terrible! He would discard you—he would disown you! Oh, Mr. Dalham, how immense is the debt of gratitude which I owe you!"

"Speak not of that, Winifred," responded Roderick Dalham. "It is impossible to help admiring your virtues and the magnanimity of your character. But let me solicit a few explanations from your lips—although I have little difficulty in conjecturing the reasons that induced you to suppress all those circumstances which might have told so well in your defence."

"Has not Mr. Wardour explained to you everything?" inquired Winifred. "On the day when the examination before the magistrate took place, I revealed all the circumstances to that gentleman."

"But it was under a promise of implicit secrecy on his part," rejoined Dalham; "and therefore he would repeat nothing—no, not even to me! I did not press him; and indeed I knew not whether there might be any secret which you would wish to keep from my knowledge!"—

"No, no, Mr. Dalham! I am incapable of such ingratitude!" exclaimed Winifred; "for to you would I tell everything, even in preference to Mr. Wardour himself!"

"That mystery relative to the ring," said Dalham,—"I cannot completely fathom it: and yet methinks I can comprehend how it must have fallen into the vile woman's hands!"—

"That ring belonged to my mother," answered

Winifred. "You know under what circumstances you and I first met," she continued, a deep blush overspreading her countenance.

"Yes, yes," said Dalham, speaking hastily, for he was perfectly aware how painful the subject must be to the young girl. "But about the ring!"—

"I will tell you," she responded. "That vile woman Mrs. Chicklade came one Sunday afternoon to Whitecross Street Prison to see some man who was there. This was about two years ago; and she then beheld me for the first time. She afterwards stopped me in the street and began to address me in a strain which I could not at first understand, but of which a dim comprehension began at length to arise in my mind. She told me how I might earn much gold and lead a life of pleasure and of indolence: but I need not tell you, Mr. Dalham, what the wretch said—for you can well understand the tenour of that insidious discourse which such a woman was likely to hold unto me. It was at the time when I was so truly wretched: it was just after my aunt's death, when my cousin Gustavus had gone to sea, and when I was thrown utterly on my own resources. I was driven almost to madness; for in imagination I beheld my poor grandfather starving—and Oh! the bare idea thereof cut me to the very quick! Yet when that old woman addressed me in the insidious language of temptation, I recoiled from it in horror the moment I began to comprehend it. She waylaid me several times; and on each occasion she grew bolder and plainer in the language which she used. The state of my mind was growing day by day more desperate, and I listened to her in spite of all the loathing and repugnance that I entertained. At last, one day, I found the slender stock of money left me by my poor aunt utterly exhausted; and I dared not tell my grandfather how I was situated. He thought I had money still left; and he desired me to bring him different things—little comforts that he needed; so that it was with a reeling brain I listened to his words. I had no money and no work; and I had already made away with as much of my apparel as I could possibly dispense with. But I had my mother's ring still left. I had to decide whether I would part with it, or whether I should keep it and see my grandfather die of starvation. I decided upon the former course: I would dispose of the ring. I took it to a pawnbroker's—but he refused to receive it unless I gave a reference to prove my respectability and thus show that I had come honourably by it. I issued from his shop in despair. In the street I met Mrs. Chicklade, who seemed to be lying in wait for me. I have read in romances how men in moments of desperation have sold their souls to the Evil One; and it was in a similar mood that I acceded that woman. I told her my tale—and she offered to dispose of the ring for me. I assented: I was to meet her again in an hour or two. I met her—she told me a tale of difficulties which she had to encounter—how she had left the ring at some place, and how two or three days must elapse before its sale could be effected. Then I was indeed frenzied. She whispered evil words in my ear—I scarcely knew what I was doing—I was mad at the time—I suffered her to lead me to her own abode—and there I met you!"

"Yes, yes," again said Mr. Dalham hastily. "But the ring?"

"Subsequently, when the vile woman learnt how in you I had accidentally encountered the son of my grandfather's enemy, and how you had promised to befriend me, she said that she must be paid her reward for having introduced me to one who was thus inclined to succour me; and she expressed her intention of keeping the ring as her recompense. Vainly did I remonstrate—vainly did I entreat and threaten: she threatened a thousand things in return—and I was compelled to yield. Then nearly two years passed away; and often and often when I thought of your generosity and goodness in supplying the means of keeping my aged grandsire from starvation, I could scarcely begrudge Mrs. Chicklade the possession of the ring, although it had been my poor mother's, as her reward for having been the means of introducing me to you. But on that memorable day when I met her in the bye-lane immediately after my interview with you, I beheld the ring upon her finger: she displayed it to me with a boastful triumph—and I implored her to suffer me to repurchase it. I could not bear to see that ring which had belonged to my pure and good and virtuous mother, on the finger of that loathsome wretch! I had just received a handsome remuneration from Miss Evelyn, of Sidney Villa, for some work I had done: but it was money that ought to have lasted for upwards of a week in the maintenance of my grandfather and myself. Yet I resolved to make any sacrifice sooner than leave the ring with that vile woman. I therefore gave her the entire contents of my purse: I left myself penniless, inwardly resolving to dispose of part of my wardrobe to obtain the wherewith to administer to my grandsire's comforts until fresh earnings should reward my hard toil. This, Mr. Dalham, is the history of the ring; and thereat Mr. Wardour hinted in his speech somewhat more plainly than I considered to be perfectly consistent with his promise to keep my history a secret."

"He did not violate your confidence," replied Mr. Dalham; "for even if you had told him nothing, his natural ingenuity would have helped him to some such solution of the mystery as that which he hinted at in court—and his reputation as a barrister compelled him to seize upon whatsoever idea was suggested or pointed at by the very circumstances of the case itself. But why should you have been so particular in veiling that transaction in such utter mystery?"

"Oh! why was I particular in shrouding everything in mystery to the utmost of my power?" exclaimed Winifred. "Because to have revealed a portion would have been to afford a clue to the discovery of everything; and I would sooner have perished—yes, I would sooner than yesterday's verdict should have been the very opposite of what it was, than that the whole tale should have been made known! You yourself respected my secret when you first communicated with Mr. Wardour; for you simply told him that you had been introduced to me through the medium of Mrs. Chicklade, but that my virtue was unimpeachable. Oh, yes, Mr. Dalham! there were a thousand reasons for the course which I have been pursuing!—a thousand reasons for my silence in respect to everything which related to my tempo-

rary connexion with that vile woman! Could I confess for what reason she had originally kept the ring? Who would have believed the tale that when I suffered her to introduce me to a gentleman, I found in that gentleman a man of honour who scorned to take advantage of the circumstances which had thrown me in his way? I would have died upon the scaffold sooner than mention your name—yes, I would have perished rather than have had it yesterday proclaimed in the court from Mr. Wardour's lips that I had been thus introduced to a gentleman, and that this gentleman was Mr. Dalham, the son of my grandsire's opponent in the lawsuit! For, as I have before said, if your father knew that you had in any way succoured those who bear the hated name of Berrington, he would have discredited, disowned, and disinherited you—and your noble generosity to me and my poor old grandsire would have been the cause of your utter ruin!"

"This magnanimous motive on your part, Winifred, I all along understood," said Roderick Dalham; "and I knew that it was useless for me to remonstrate, for that you would remain firm to any resolution you had formed. Besides, I also felt that the whole secret connected with Mrs. Chicklade was your own, and that you had a right to deal with it as you thought fit."

"Moreover," continued Winifred, "there were other reasons which prompted me: I dared not suffer your name to be in any way mentioned—I dared not allow it to transpire, because it would have killed my grandfather with grief if it had come to his knowledge that he had for nearly two years past been subsisting on your bounty, while believing that my own earnings were the source of the comforts which he enjoyed. Thus, sooner than your name should have been mentioned, I was prepared to sacrifice myself!"

"Yes, yes—so I understood it, admirable girl that you are!" exclaimed Dalham: "but I was resolved to save you. For this purpose I so managed as to get upon the jury; and if that project had failed, I was resolved to stand up in the court and proclaim all I knew rather than that a hostile verdict should have been pronounced against you. You, Winifred, were prepared to encounter death rather than reveal those circumstances which would have caused my father to cast me off for ever: I on the other hand was equally resolved to bring all that ruin upon myself rather than that your innocent life should be sacrificed. Heaven knows how the wretched woman came by her death!—heaven knows who was her murderer!—but all the points of evidence which weighed strongly against yourself—the expressions which fell from your lips, and which were overheard by young De Vere—all could have been explained away by the revelation of the circumstances attending your antecedent knowledge of Mrs. Chicklade. Admirable girl that you are!" repeated Roderick Dalham, "you would in the first instance have sold your virtue in order to procure bread for your grandsire;—and now you would have surrendered up your young life rather than ruin me with my father by proclaiming that for two years past I had been your friend!"

There was a brief pause, during which Roderick Dalham contemplated Winifred with looks of warmest admiration; while her eyes were pen-



sively bent downward, she being unconscious that he was thus surveying her.

"Winifred," he at length resumed—and now he spoke in a lower and more tender tone than at first,—“I came to you on this occasion not merely to converse relative to the past, but to make you a proposition. I am double your age—I have been dissipated and wild in my time; but if these circumstances do not utterly shut me out from the attainment of the hope that I cherish, one word from your lips will render me perfectly happy. I love you—and I offer you my hand. We will wed in secret,—so that neither my father nor your grandsire—”

“No, Mr. Dalham—it is impossible!” interrupted Winifred, whose look and tone were alike firm and decisive. “A thousand, thousand thanks for the honour which you are doing me—for the favour which you would confer upon me!—but it cannot be! Numerous reasons compel me, Mr.

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Dalham, to give this negative response. As a benefactor—as one who in spite of all the strong injunctions and frightful threats of malediction issued by a father—yes, as one who has been bold and chivalrous enough to befriend those who bear the name of Barrington, you have a right to become the arbiter of my destinies. But you will not use your power despotically?”

“No—not for worlds!” exclaimed Roderick Dalham. “You know, Winifred, that I would do anything to insure your happiness: but I should hate myself were I to do aught that might render you unhappy. Long have I admired your character without ever dreaming that this admiration on my part would expand into a more tender sentiment. But when I think of all the miseries you have undergone, and of the noble sacrifices which you were prepared to make,—when I think likewise that circumstances seem lately to have been blending the threads of our destinies—bringing us

nearer and nearer to each other—placing it in my power to save your life—rendering me as it were necessary to you,—when I contemplate all these things—”

“Yes,” interrupted Winifred, “there have indeed been strange coincidences; and you have had it in your power to render me immense services. But never can I regard you otherwise than as a friend. Indeed, I will be candid with you, Mr. Dalham,” continued Winifred, with blushing cheeks and downcast looks: “there has been a love in my heart—perhaps it still lingers there—though I am endeavouring to stifle it—a love for another—one who is absent—who has himself suffered deeply—”

“You mean your cousin Gustavus,” said Roderick Dalham. “Well, it is natural, Winifred; and may you both be happy together! Yet why did you speak of stifling this love of your’s?”

“Alas! because I know that the happiness which you so generously hope that we may enjoy, is an impossibility! If love be not dead in my heart, it must at least be triumphed over by the effort of my own strong will. Never will I accompany Gustavus to the altar! never will I bestow this hand upon him! I believe that he loves me—yes, I am confident of it—and that he went forth into the great world with the hope that happier days would come when we should be united, never again to separate. And I too have dreamt the same!—but that dream can now never be realized!”

“Good heaven, Winifred!” ejaculated Roderick Dalham, “why do you speak in this desponding tone?”

“Do you forget, sir,” asked the young girl, with a voice and look of melancholy sweetness, “that to your generosity I am indebted for the rescue of my life from the hangman’s loathsome touch and the halter’s hideous pressure? Have I not passed through the ordeal of Newgate? have I not breathed the contaminating atmosphere of felony? Has not a horrible accusation been made against me?—and though yesterday acquitted, yet is there no lingering degradation attaching itself to my name? In a word, I have become an object of notoriety—”

“No, no—of sympathy!” ejaculated Dalham. “The whole world now looks upon you as innocent!”

“It may be so, sir—and I hope it is,” answered Winifred: but her look and her voice both alike indicated doubt and mistrust upon the point to which she was alluding. “At all events I feel that one who has passed through the dread ordeal from which I have just issued, is not a fitting bride for a noble-minded, generous-hearted young man such as Gustavus.”

“Your mind, Winifred, has received a terrible shock from recent circumstances,” responded Mr. Dalham: “and you contemplate everything through this morbid medium. Rest assured that you will think differently when your spirits acquire their wonted healthy tone. Yes—believe me, you will yet be happy with your cousin Gustavus!”

Winifred shook her head mournfully; and Roderick Dalham, fearing to pursue a topic which was evidently painful, turned the discourse into another channel. He delicately proffered pecu-

niary assistance; but it was with the greatest difficulty he could induce Winifred to accept anything from the contents of his purse—and then it was only a small sum which she would take, so as to meet her expenses until her own industry with the needle should once more become productive. Roderick Dalham departed, full of a tender admiration for the young girl; and she ascended to her own chamber to reflect upon everything that had passed at this interview.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CICELY’S NEW PLOT.

It has been seen that Cicely, on her return from Edinburgh, continued to exercise the completest coercion over her uncle Mr. Timperley. This gentleman was only too glad to possess himself of the letter which his niece had displayed to him, at the enormous cost of thirty thousand pounds. The sum was duly paid; for Mr. Timperley was very rich, and was accustomed to hold the chief portion of his funds in a manner that should be readily available at a few hours’ notice. Hector Hardress—although in a measure prepared for any proceeding however extraordinary on the part of his bride—was nevertheless as much astonished as pleased when he found that she had kept her word, and that her dower was so handsome. She now stipulated that the marriage ceremony should be duly performed according to the rites of the English Church; and Hardress offered no objection. She was already his wife in point of law; and it could make but little difference to him that she should become his wife in point of religious ceremony also. The marriage was accordingly solemnised with the utmost privacy,—Mr. and Mrs. Timperley being the only witnesses. A marriage settlement had previously been drawn up by Mr. Timperley, in virtue of which Cicely exercised absolute control over her fortune: but she assured Hardress that so long as he conducted himself in a becoming manner towards her, he should be supplied with the means of enjoying all the pleasures of life and living according to his rank and station.

Mr. Timperley was careful to conceal any spite or vexation which he might cherish towards his niece for the coercive power which she had exercised over him. He was one of those men who always make the best of a bad job—he saw that Cicely’s marriage with a scion of the aristocracy would greatly increase his own consequence—and it was moreover his interest to keep on friendly terms with Cicely, for reasons which cannot be at present explained. Mrs. Timperley was so delighted at the brilliant alliance contracted by her niece, that she highly approved of what she believed to be her husband’s spontaneous bequest of the thirty thousand pounds—although she marvelled that he should have been so generous in respect to the young lady’s dower.

Immediately after the solemnization of the private marriage, the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Hardress took a genteel house at Baywater; and they furnished it elegantly, but not too expensively—otherwise a considerable encroachment would have

been made upon Cicely's dower. Some few of Hector's male friends called upon them the moment they were settled in their new home; but none of the ladies of the aristocracy stopped in their carriages to leave a card at that house. Nothing was known to the discredit of Cicely; but still the union of Lord Mendlesham's son and heir with a lawyer's niece was considered to be a match not deserving of countenance,—at least so long as Hector's own family abstained from stamping it with their approval. Lord and Lady Mendlesham vowed that they never would accord this approval; and they haughtily proclaimed that "the young woman styling herself the Hon. Mrs. Hardress, should never cross the threshold of their mansion."

This saying was by some means or another wadded to Cicely's ears; but instead of exhibiting either indignation or annoyance, she simply said, in her usual quiet tone of confidence, "We shall see."

Lord Mendlesham was, as the reader will recollect, to a certain extent a client of Mr. Timperley, through whose hands the income allowed to Mrs. De Vere was paid. Mr. Timperley was therefore acquainted with a certain secret in respect to Lord Mendlesham; and his lordship, upon hearing of the marriage, naturally conceived that the old lawyer had inveigled Hector into this alliance with his niece. His lordship went privately to Mr. Timperley's office to reproach him on the subject: but Mr. Timperley vowed and protested that he was perfectly innocent on the point, and that he was not even aware his niece was acquainted with Hector until after the elopement took place. As a proof of this statement, Mr. Timperley displayed the letter written by Hardress from Edinburgh; and Lord Mendlesham was compelled to be satisfied.

"Nevertheless, Timperley," he said, "I never will acknowledge your niece as my daughter; and if you make such a request on her behalf, there shall be an immediate end of all dealings betwixt you and me. You know that I have privately recommended you a number of excellent clients; and you must therefore calculate whether it be worth your while to quarrel with me—especially as such a quarrel would only be for a fruitless purpose, inasmuch as you would not succeed in your aim. No!—sooner then yield, I would suffer you to turn spitefully round upon me and proclaim all you know of a certain episode in my life!"

"My lord," replied Mr. Timperley, obsequiously, "I will never betray the secret; and I humbly hope that your lordship will not withdraw from me that patronage which though privately demonstrated, has nevertheless been of the utmost service."

"On the understanding, therefore, that you never mention to me the name of your niece," replied the nobleman, "I will consent that in all other respects you and I remain the same towards each other as heretofore. As for my son, I shall make him a small allowance. I cannot at my death exclude him from his heritage of titles and estates: but so long as I live, I will exercise the paternal power—and I will discard him!"

Having thus spoken, the indignant Lord Mendlesham left the attorney's office.

We should observe that although Cicely had

been informed by her uncle that Lord Mendlesham was one of his clients, she suspected not that there was any particular secret between them; or else she would have very soon extorted it to use for the purposes which she had in view. When Mr. Timperley had mentioned to her that his connexion with Lord Mendlesham was of a private character, and that the fact was not to be repeated to Hector,—Cicely had supposed that they were mere money-affairs to which her uncle alluded; for she knew that he was accustomed to advance loans to the aristocracy: but she did not consider such a circumstance in respect to Lord Mendlesham to be of sufficient importance to be called to the aid of her own projects. In other words, she did not conceive that the power of Mr. Timperley as a money-lender would be sufficient to induce Lord Mendlesham to stifle his prideful feelings and acknowledge her as his daughter-in-law. She therefore looked to other means for the accomplishment of this aim.

Hector Hardress had necessarily discovered that his valet Luke Corbet had for some time past been playing a treacherous game towards himself, and one that was in favour of Cicely. Now that Cicely had succeeded, and that Hardress submitted to his destiny, he might have pardoned Luke Corbet and buried the fact in oblivion: but every fashionable young gentleman likes to have a valet in whom he can trust—and Luke was no longer trustworthy. Therefore Hector decided upon discharging him the moment they returned to London; and Cicely knew that it would be an outrage upon her husband's feelings to take the valet's part. She therefore assented to his dismissal: but she obtained the promise that a good character should be given to Luke whenever it might suit his purpose to obtain another situation:—and she privately added with liberality to the bribe she had already given the man. She had moreover still some work for him to do, in furtherance of certain projects which she was about to carry on unknown to her husband.

Cicely was ambitious; and she was therefore enterprising, as all ambitious people are. She had succeeded in making a good match: she had already the title of *Honourable* prefixed to her name; and in the course of events she would become Lady Mendlesham—a peer's wife! But all this was not sufficient. She must be recognised by her husband's family; and as the result of that recognition, she must be introduced to the best society. These were her aims; and she was resolved to accomplish them. Besides, there was a tincture of vindictiveness in Cicely's disposition; and she felt that it would be sweet to humble the pride of Lord and Lady Mendlesham, as well as to force those ladies of the aristocracy who now kept coldly aloof, to hasten to overwhelm her with their courtesies.

It was a month after the marriage that the incidents occurred which we are about to relate. One evening Cicely was seated alone in her elegantly-furnished drawing-room at Baywater; and half-reclining upon the sofa, she was reflecting on her projects. Hector had gone out to dine with some friends at an hotel; for Cicely encouraged him in seeking amusement away from home—not merely because his occasional absence was convenient to herself, but likewise because she did not wish him

to become disgusted with the monotony of a retired life. The deep reverie of the Hon. Mrs. Hardress was presently interrupted by the entrance of the footman, who was dressed in a plain but neat livery; and he said, "If you please, ma'am, Luke Corbet requests the favour of a few minutes' interview."

"Ah! I daresay," observed Mrs. Hardress, with an air of careless indifference, "he comes for a reference as to character; and I will therefore see him."

The footman retired; and in a few moments Luke Corbet made his appearance. He bowed low, and looked to see that the door had been closely shut by the retiring footman.

"Well, Luke," said Cicely, "what tidings have you for me?—and are they good?"

"As good as you could wish, ma'am," replied Luke. "Selina has broached the subject—and the young lady has agreed. Indeed, it was high time—for it cannot possibly be put off any longer. It is only a wonder how it could have been concealed so long——"

"And you are certain that she agrees?" inquired Cicely with mingled anxiety and exultation; though she instantaneously composed her feelings and became placid as before.

"She cannot do otherwise than agree, ma'am," rejoined Luke; "and she is deeply grateful. Selina told her everything that I had suggested—which was according to your instructions, ma'am——"

"Yes, yes," said Cicely: "I have no doubt that this Selina of your's, after all you have told me, is astute, wary, and trustworthy. Besides, her own interests are so deeply concerned——"

"To be sure, ma'am," said Luke. "We have been engaged for a considerable time—but we had not saved enough to dare think of marriage until your goodness began to open a better prospect——"

"And now, Luke," interjected Cicely, "there will be nothing to interfere with the crowning of your wishes. In a short time you and Selina may marry: you will have a pretty little capital to begin the world with. Or you can both go into the same service in some family—you as valet or butler, your wife as housekeeper—where married persons are not objected to."

"To be sure, ma'am," responded Luke. "I represented all this to Selina; and therefore she entered into the scheme. It is only now for you to say when it shall be carried out."

"I will leave London to-morrow," rejoined Cicely; "and they may come if they like the day after. But you are sure that the house at Hastings is in every way fitted for the reception——"

"I have already assured you, ma'am," replied Luke, "that your instructions were completely attended to. You know I have never deceived you in any respect, nor misrepresented anything——"

"No—you have always served me faithfully. But there is still one point on which I entertain certain misgivings. I allude to the possibility of a sufficient excuse being invented——"

"You have nothing to fear, ma'am, on that head," exclaimed Luke. "Selina assured me that her young mistress could easily devise the means for absenting herself from home for six weeks or a couple of months."

"Then, in that case," said Cicely, "everything is settled. I repeat, I shall leave London to-morrow. By the bye, I am to be Mrs. Hanbury?"

"Precisely so, ma'am," responded Luke, with a significant smile; "and your visitress is a Mrs. Colebrook."

"Good!" said Cicely. "Take this—and now leave me."

The man bowed on receiving the gold which Cicely placed in his hand; and when he had quitted the room, an indescribable look of mingled triumph, commiseration, and malicious viodictness swept over the countenance of Cicely.

"Poor girl!" she murmured to herself; "she is amiable, I am told—and yet I must sacrifice her to my own interests! But it is impossible in this world to succeed in the accomplishment of one's selfish aims, without crushing the feelings of others. If I behold a superb flower in the midst of a parterre and desire to possess it, I must trample on some of the smaller flowerets in order to make my way towards the object of my fancy."

Cicely now waited patiently until her husband returned—which was not much before midnight; and he was somewhat surprised to find that she was sitting up for him—for this was the first time she had done so.

"I hope you have enjoyed yourself, my dear Hector?" she said, welcoming him with a smile.

"Perfectly," he responded, with an equal degree of good-humour.

"I am glad of it. We did not marry to make each other miserable, nor to be a coercive check upon each other's actions. You have the advantage over me: you have society—and I have none. Nevertheless, the more you enjoy yourself the better I shall be pleased;—and I wish, by the bye, that you would to-morrow purchase that horse to which you took a fancy, and of which you spoke this morning."

"You are very good, Cicely," answered Hector. "I wish you yourself could devise some means for your own recreation—something by way of a change——"

"An opportunity has presented itself," rejoined Cicely. "I have this evening received a visit from an old schoolfellow of mine—a lady who is married, and settled at Hastings. She has insisted that I should pass a few days with her; and I therefore think of accepting her proposal."

"By all means!" said Hardress. "When do you purpose to set off?"

"To-morrow morning," was the reply,—“unless you have any objection?”

"Not the slightest!" exclaimed Hector. "On the contrary, I am truly and sincerely glad that you have this opportunity of obtaining a little recreation. Where can I write to you if I should have anything to communicate?"

"To the care of Mrs. Hanbury, Mowbray Villa, near Hastings. She tells me that it is a beautiful little place—a mile and a half from the town—and quite secluded—a charming retreat indeed. And Hastings, you know, in this December season, has a climate as genial as that of Brighton."

"I am sure you will enjoy yourself," rejoined Hector. "But you will return before Christmas?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Cicely. "This is but the fifth of the month, you know; and at the very outside I shall not remain absent more than a week."

On the following morning the Hon. Mrs. Hardress took her departure from the house at Bayswater, and was conveyed in her own carriage to the London Bridge railway-station. She on some excuse dispensed with the attendance of her lady's-maid; and she therefore travelled by herself in the train to Hastings, where she arrived in the afternoon. Thence she took a hackney-fly to Mowbray Villa,—which little residence was precisely as she had described it to her husband Hector, and which description was in accordance with the one she had received from Luke Corbet. Although it was now the beginning of December, yet as the garden in which the villa stood was filled with evergreens, some of which had grown to a considerable height—and as there was a fine grass plat in front of the house, and the railings were painted a bright green, and there were green balconies and verandahs, besides green venetian shutters—the place had altogether a cheerful aspect. It was two o'clock in the afternoon when Cicely arrived; the day was fine—there was no bleakness in the atmosphere; and thus all circumstances combined to impress her with a favourable idea of Mowbray Villa.

When the hackney-fly stopped at the gate, a gardener who was employed within the enclosure, hastened to attend upon the new comer; and on a bell being rung, a neatly-dressed elderly female issued forth from the villa. She was followed by a pretty and genteel-looking housemaid; and as they had no doubt that Cicely was the lady whom they expected, they curtsied, and ushered her into the drawing-room—while the gardener carried her trunk into the hall.

"Mrs. Hanbury, I presume, ma'am?" said the elderly female, who was the housekeeper: and this question she put when the pretty maid had retired, and she was alone with Cicely in the drawing-room.

"I am Mrs. Hanbury," answered Cicely. "I suppose it is scarcely necessary to repeat the terms on which my servant engaged Mowbray Villa?"

"For two months certain, ma'am—perhaps for three," replied the housekeeper. "Terms, four guineas a week, with all requisite attendance. You see, ma'am, Captain and Mrs. Campbell, my master and mistress, always go to London during the winter; and therefore if they can let the villa ready furnished for a few months, they have no objection."

"Certainly not," rejoined Cicely. "But I suppose that my servant dropped you a hint in reference to the actual purpose for which the villa was required for a couple of months—though of course the man could not speak to you so frankly on the subject as I myself can."

"He said sufficient, ma'am," responded the housekeeper, "to afford me an insight into the matter: but of course that's nobody's business except their's whom it concerns. He paid me a month in advance—and I gave him a receipt. But if I may be so bold, ma'am," continued the housekeeper, with a mysteriously significant air, "I would recommend Mr. Saunders—a very clever practitioner. He is an elderly gentleman—mar-

ried—and will keep a secret. If he should in after-life see the poor dear young lady——"

"Mrs. Colebrook is the name she will choose to pass by," interjected Cicely.

"Well, if Mr. Saunders should meet her in after-life, either in a bye lane where there is nobody else but their two selves, or in the midst of a room crowded with people, he will not appear to recognise her—he will pass her just for all the world as if he had never in his life seen her before."

"That is just the medical attendant who will suit," said Cicely. "He shall be engaged on your recommendation. I see that you are a woman of circumspection and prudence. This is an affair in which the dishonour of a young lady, if it should by accident transpire, would redound upon an entire family; and therefore we cannot be too cautious. But I have yet something to tell you—something to confide to your discretion. The young lady does not know me by sight: she only knows me by name. It is through the medium of her lady's-maid that I have become interested in the matter. The truth is——But what is your name?"

"Mrs. Bulkins, ma'am, at your service," replied the housekeeper.

"Well, Mrs. Bulkins," continued Cicely, "the truth is, that this young lady of whom we are speaking, believes the villa to be my own—or at least my own proper habitation: and she does not know that it is merely temporarily hired for her special accommodation. She thinks that her lady's-maid was once in my service at this very villa; and that I, not being quite so well off as I could wish, have agreed to receive the young lady during the time of her trouble. It is an innocent cheat you see, Mrs. Bulkins, and cannot make the slightest difference to you; but still it is necessary that the tale should be consistently persevered in by all with whom the young lady may come in contact."

"Oh, I understand, ma'am!" said the housekeeper, simpering and curtsying as she received the couple of guineas which Cicely slipped into her hand. "I will take care that if the young lady should happen to speak to the housemaid concerning you, there shall be no contradiction given to the tale it has pleased you to tell."

"And Mr. Saunders likewise," suggested Cicely. "And Mr. Saunders likewise," added Mrs. Bulkins.

Here the colloquy terminated; and Cicely began to roam through the villa that she might make herself acquainted with every nook and corner thereof, so that she might not seem at a loss in respect to its topography when her visitress should arrive. The house was very well furnished, and possessed every comfort for the use and accommodation of a genteel family; for the Campbells were well off, but mean to a degree; and it was therefore their habit to make the letting of Mowbray Villa in the neighbourhood of Hastings pay for the lodgings which they occupied in the metropolis during their winter sojourn there.

On the following day, at about two o'clock, the Hon. Mrs. Hardress—now bearing for the nonce the name of Mrs. Hanbury—was on the look-out for the expected arrival of the young lady who was to bear the name of Mrs. Colebrook. Not

however that Cicely thought the young lady would make her appearance much before the evening; for in order to arrive there at two in the afternoon it would be necessary for her to leave by an early train in the morning—and it was more probable that she would consult her convenience by taking a later one. And Cicely was right: for it was not until seven o'clock in the evening that a hackney-fly from Hastings drew up at the gate of the villa. Cicely hastened forth, followed by Mrs. Bulkins and the housemaid, to receive the visitress. A young lady, enveloped in a cloak and with a black veil over her countenance, alighted from the vehicle: she was evidently in a state of considerable agitation—for she clung to Cicely's arm for support. Then her maid descended; and Cicely, in order to keep up appearances, said, "How do you do, Selina?"

"Quite well I thank you, me'am; and I hope I find you the same," was the ready response.

Cicely now conducted Mrs. Colebrook into the villa; and on reaching the drawing-room where the lamps were lighted and a cheerful fire was blazing in the grate, the young lady shook Cicely by the hand, faltering forth, "Oh, Mrs. Hanbury, how can I ever testify my gratitude for all this kindness?"

"Don't be excited or agitated, my dear Mrs. Colebrook," responded Cicely: "consider this house to be your home. I have taken every precaution—I have told the servants a suitable tale—a medical gentleman is engaged to attend upon you—one in whose honour you may place trust—"

"Oh, what kindness!" murmured the young lady, as she sank upon the sofa, overpowered by her feelings.

Selina in the meanwhile had been hastening over the house with Mrs. Bulkins, to make herself acquainted with its arrangements, for precisely the same reason which had influenced Cicely on the preceding day—namely, that she might not be at a loss in any respect when in the presence of her mistress, but on the contrary might seem quite familiar with the place where she was supposed to have lived before. Selina was a genteel-looking woman, of about two-and-thirty—of plain countenance, though not actually ugly—of good manners, ready wit, and somewhat unprincipled disposition. At the same time she was incapable of any action positively criminal: but her moral notions were not so stringent as to prevent her from making money by a complicity in the plot in which Mrs. Hardress was engaged. Moreover, Selina, as we have seen, had been successfully courted by Luke Corbet; and they had only required a little improvement in their prospects in order to think seriously of matrimony.

During the few minutes which elapsed after Mrs. Colebrook's introduction into the drawing-room, while she expressed her gratitude to Cicely and then sat overpowered by her feelings on the sofa, she retained her veil over her countenance in such a way that Mrs. Hardress could barely catch a glimpse of her features. Cicely however already knew that she was beautiful; and that partial glimpse was sufficient to confirm the impression. Selina now entered to conduct her young mistress to the chamber prepared for her reception; and there she remained for nearly half-an-hour.

At the expiration of that interval Mrs. Colebrook returned to the drawing-room, in a plain evening toilet. She no longer wore a veil over her countenance; and thus Cicely was at length enabled to obtain a full view of her. And truly beautiful she was. Her age was between twenty and twenty-one: she was of fair complexion, and had glossy auburn hair. There was an expression of peculiar sweetness in her features—an expression of candour and innocence; so that it seemed strange how such a being could have yielded to the wiles of the seducer. Yet so it was; for this young lady was, as the reader must have already comprehended, in a way to become a mother without being a wife. Yet although an interval of six weeks would scarcely elapse ere the crisis must arrive, yet was the fact so little, if indeed at all perceptible, that Cicely would never have suspected it unless previously informed of the circumstance. The young lady was tall and well formed, with a remarkably fine bust: but she stooped slightly—though very slightly, and not in an ungraceful manner. It was as the flower slightly inclines upon its stalk. She had large blue eyes, full of a soft pensiveness—regular features, delicately shaped—an oval countenance—red lips—and faultless teeth. There was in her bearing all the grace of an elegant refinement; and though her manners were frank and affable, without the slightest tincture of pride, yet was it easy to perceive that she was a young lady of distinction, and that her accustomed place in society was in an exalted sphere.

Cicely surveyed her with admiration, blended with sympathy and remorse. Indeed for a few moments Cicely was staggered in her purpose; and she thought within herself, "No! I never can betray this beautiful and amiable young lady!"

But a feeling of selfishness was not long ere it predominated over those better sentiments; and Cicely's heart was hardened.

Three days passed,—during which Mrs. Colebrook became accustomed to her new home; and even in that short time she learnt to look upon Cicely as one of the dearest and kindest friends whom she had ever possessed,—the friend who was saving her from the exposure of her frailty, from shame and dishonour. She did not once allude to the author of her misfortune; though Cicely well knew who her seducer was—that secret having been revealed to her by Luke Corbet, who had heard it from Selina. And Cicely also well knew that the unprincipled individual had recently betrayed another too confiding girl!

Mr. Saunders was introduced to the villa: he was all urbanity and kindness—he had received his cue from Mrs. Bulkins—and he said not a syllable which was calculated to raise a blush to his unfortunate patient's cheeks nor to humiliate her in his presence. Thus everything progressed as favourably as circumstances would permit.

On the fourth morning after the young lady's arrival at Mowbray Villa, Cicely received a letter, which was delivered to her when seated at the breakfast-table, and which appeared to cause her much chagrin. Mrs. Colebrook watched her countenance with anxiety; for in certain circumstances a female who is placed in a false position, invariably fancies that whatever sinister occurs directly regards herself.

"This is indeed most annoying!" said Cicely, assuming an air of great vexation as she referred to the letter. "I would rather that anything should have happened——"

"My dear Mrs. Hanbury," said the young lady, much agitated, "I hope that I am in no way a source of embarrassment to your proceedings——"

"Oo, do not think of such a thing!" ejaculated Cicely. "I am annoyed because I find myself compelled to leave you for a few days. I have received the intelligence that a very dear friend of mine, residing at Dover, is about to proceed to the Continent on a two years' trip; and she wishes to see me before she departs. I am afraid that you will be dull during my absence—especially as you persist in not stirring beyond the grounds of the villa——"

"I shall assuredly be dull, my dear friend," replied the young lady, "because I shall miss you so much! But you must not think of me; and I must endeavour to divert my mind as well as I am able. I beseech you, Mrs. Hanbury, not to annoy yourself on my account."

It was accordingly decided that Cicely should depart. Her young friend threw herself into her arms, and embraced her with as much affection as if they had known each other for years instead of days. But gratitude is a soil in which the flowers of friendship and love speedily spring up, to bloom most luxuriantly. Again was Mrs. Hardress smitten with remorse and moved with the tenderest sympathy; but when seated in the vehicle which was conveying her into Hastings, she again hardened her heart—and selfishness predominated over every other consideration.

"She is lulled into a sense of the completest security," thought Cicely: "she will remain there in the confidence that she is safe. Little suspects she the storm which is brewing;—and would to God that I were not the evil genius whose hand was constrained to grasp the thunderbolt! But it must be so: I can think only of myself! Perish all other considerations!"

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Cicely arrived in London; and on reaching the railway station, she took a cab for the West End. In due course the vehicle stopped in front of a stately mansion; and Cicely alighted. Her summons at the front door was speedily answered by the hall-porter; and she inquired, "Is his lordship at home?"

"He is, ma'am," was the reply. "What name shall I send up?"

"It is needless to send any name," answered Cicely: "his lordship does not know me—but I come upon very important business."

"And yet, ma'am," said the hall-porter, who though still profoundly respectful, nevertheless began to survey Cicely with some little degree of suspicion, as if he had an idea who she might possibly be,— "it is usual to send up the name——"

"Well, then, say Mrs. Hanbury from Hastings," interrupted Cicely, who saw the necessity of giving a name of some kind.

The hall-porter's countenance instantaneously cleared up. He had for a moment suspected that this might possibly be the Mrs. Hardress who on no account was to be admitted into the mansion; but that bold specification of another name and of

an address at such a distance from the metropolis, set the man's mind at rest. He accordingly summoned the footman, and bade him conduct the lady into his lordship's presence. Cicely inwardly exulted at the success which had thus far attended her proceedings: for although she had never before been to this mansion, she had thought it by no means unlikely that some of the domestics might know her by sight—in which case she would have found the portals closed against her: for the reader has by this time comprehended that it was Lord Mendlesham's palatial abode at which Cicely had now presented herself. Having been conducted up a wide and splendid staircase, Mrs. Hardress found herself upon a landing embellished with fine pictures and porcelain vases, and whence two long passages branched off, communicating with various apartments. The footman threw open a door, and announced, "Mrs. Hanbury."

Lord Mendlesham, who had been seated alone in that room, rose from his chair and bowed somewhat stiffly—or with what might be better described as a haughty courtesy; for the name of Mrs. Hanbury was utterly unknown to him. Yet when, on a second glance, he beheld a fine young lady, handsomely dressed, and of very genteel appearance, he unbent somewhat from his aristocratic hauteur, and indicated a seat, saying, "I do not think I have previously had the honour of Mrs. Hanbury's acquaintance?"

Cicely now beheld her father-in-law for the first time; and she saw before her a man in his forty-sixth year—tall, upright, and somewhat stoutly built—with dark grey expressive eyes, an aquiline profile, and the brown hair slightly mingled with grey and worn away from off the temples and the front part of the crown. His countenance was intellectual; but his whole demeanour indicated the patrician pride of one of the high Tory school.

"I have to request your lordship's patience for a few minutes," said Cicely, who had the easy affable manner of a gentlewoman, and who was by no means embarrassed nor overawed by finding herself in the presence of this proud peer. "I come from Hastings, where I have seen some one who is connected with your lordship, and in whom you are naturally much interested."

"I scarcely know to whom you can possibly allude, madam," replied the nobleman coldly; "for my daughter the Hon. Miss Hardress is at Brighton; and as for my son——In short, I have ceased to be interested in him at all."

"It is to your lordship's daughter that I allude," responded Cicely.

"To my daughter? and you say that you have seen her at Hastings? Well, it is quite possible she may have paid a visit thither—it is not very far from Brighton. But I hope, Mrs. Hanbury," added Lord Mendlesham, now speaking with some degree of anxiety, "that you are the bearer of no evil intelligence in respect to my beloved child?"

"The Hon. Miss Hardress," answered Cicely, "is not staying at Brighton, and has not been to Brighton at all. She is staying at Hastings——"

"This is ridiculous, Mrs. Hanbury!" ejaculated the nobleman; "and I cannot conceive for what reason you should come to me with such a tale. I yesterday morning received a letter from my daughter at Brighton——"

"I know it, my lord; for myself sent it to Brighton to be post there."

"What?" cried the nobleman, now starting with uneasiness: "is it possible that some duplicity—But no! Josephine is incapable of it!"

"Your lordship imagines that your daughter Josephine," said Cicely, "has gone to pass a few weeks with a widow lady named Edwards: but that lady does not now reside at Brighton at all—she is on the Continent——"

"Good God! what is all this that I hear?" ejaculated Lord Mendlesham, starting up from his seat in a violent state of agitation. "Who are you, madam?—and why should my daughter be at Hastings?"

"She is residing with me, my lord, at a secluded villa about a mile and a half from the town; and when you learn how I have befriended her," added Cicely, with a look of deep mysterious meaning, "you will thank me—you will pour forth your soul in gratitude; for never did an unfortunate betrayed young lady stand more in need of a friend than your daughter Josephine!"

Lord Mendlesham grew pale as death: the strong man staggered beneath the blow inflicted by those words, as if he were a child reeling from the buffet of a giant hand; and sinking upon his chair, he gazed on Cicely in mingled consternation and dismay. In fact, for the last month or six weeks he and Lady Mendlesham had fancied that Josephine was not altogether in her usual health: but she had refused to receive a visit from the family physician—she had suggested that a little change of air was all that she required—and hence the permission accorded by her parents for her to set off (as they thought) for Brighton. Never until this instant had Lord Mendlesham entertained the slightest suspicion of the dreadful truth: but now it burst upon him with all the overwhelming force of an irresistible conviction.

"My God! my God!" he murmured: "is this possible?—am I disgraced and dishonoured in both my children? Oh, it was sufficient that Hector should have gone wrong, without Josephine being likewise brought so low!"

"The secret is safe, my lord," said Cicely: "of this you may rest assured!—and it will therefore depend upon yourself and Lady Mendlesham whether it shall remain so."

"If I did not think it was safe," responded the nobleman, in a low hollow voice,—"if I thought there was the slightest chance of exposure, I would blow out my brains: for a man who is dishonoured in his daughter, cannot look the world in the face!"

"I repeat the assurance," rejoined Cicely, "that the secret is entirely safe! Selina, your daughter's maid, is trustworthy; and your lordship may judge from the manner in which I have come to you, whether I myself am likely to betray that secret. Indeed, I have a greater interest in maintaining the honour of your family than you can as yet possibly conceive."

But the wretched nobleman heard not these last words; or if he heard them, he paid no especial heed to them: but rising from his seat, he paced to and fro in an agitated and excited manner,—ejaculating, "My God! what shame, what degradation for my proud family! Josephine seduced!—Josephine whom I believed to be the pattern of

virtue!—it seems impossible! But, Ah! that villain Clifford whom she loved! Fool, fool that I was so stercorally to forbid his suit! Yes, yes—I see it all!—the girl's anguish when I ordered him from the house—the wee-begone look she flung upon me! Insensate that I have been! But my God! how can I ever break this frightful intelligence to my wife? It will kill her!"

In this manner did the unhappy Lord Mendlesham give vent to his despair, while pacing to and fro in that apartment. For awhile he seemed unconscious of Cicely's presence,—until abruptly stopping short, he seized her hand; and pressing it warmly, said in a voice tremulous with emotion, "You are indeed a kind friend to my unhappy daughter!—yes, a friend to us all in endeavouring to throw a veil over her dishonour! You say she is residing at your house?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Cicely; "and every precaution has been taken to protect her secret from the knowledge of the world. I swear to you that it rests entirely with yourself——"

"Oh! can you for a moment doubt," exclaimed Mendlesham, "whether I myself am anxious to save my unhappy child from eternal degradation? But how came you acquainted with her secret?"

"No matter, my lord," replied Cicely: "you see that I am her friend. Perhaps I may ask a boon in return——"

"Ask anything, and it shall be granted!" ejaculated the nobleman. "If you saved my life, or the life of my daughter, I should become your eternal debtor;—and now you are saving something which is even dearer than life—you are saving the honour of the family!"

"You see, my lord," continued Cicely, with seriousness alike of tone and look, "you are afflicted in your children: but pardon me for asking whether these afflictions may not in some sense be a punishment for your own haughty pride? Start not—and be not angry with me that I use terms apparently so harsh. Because there has long been a species of feud betwixt yourself and Lord Windermere, you sternly forbade the suit of his son Theodore Clifford; and when you found that he had stealthily entered your house to pay his addresses to your daughter, you banished him under all circumstances of ignominy. Then, in respect to your son Hector——"

"Speak not of him!" ejaculated the nobleman vehemently: "he has naught to do with the present unfortunate affair!"

"And yet, my lord," said Cicely, with a firm decisiveness of tone, "it suits my purpose to speak of your son Hector."

"Madam," cried the nobleman, "you are abusing the power which circumstances have given you over me!—you are touching upon a topic which cannot possibly concern you!"

"More perhaps than your lordship imagines," responded Cicely. "Did you not ere now promise that anything I might ask as a reward for the friendship which I am displaying towards your daughter——"

"Yes, yes!" ejaculated the excited nobleman; "and if this friendship of yours be not disinterested, but can be recompensed by gold——"

"No, my lord," said the young lady proudly: "I seek not gold as a reward. But I would ask



you to whose friendship Josephine Hardress has a better right to look, than to that of her own sister-in-law?"

"What!" ejaculated Mendlesham, a light suddenly flashing in upon his mind, and his countenance as rapidly becoming stern and severe. "You, then, are not Mrs. Hanbury——"

"No, my lord—I am Mrs. Hardress:" and Cicely rose from her seat with a look of calm dignified confidence.

Under the impulse of his indignant feelings Lord Mendlesham extended his arm towards the door; and the command to quit the house was on the very point of bursting from his lips, when he was all in a moment overwhelmed by the recollection that his daughter's honour was in the keeping of the woman whom he was thus about to outrage. His arm dropped, as if paralysed, to his side—and he bent upon Cicely the look of one who felt

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himself entirely vanquished,—saying in a low voice, "And you are my son's wife?"

"I am your son's wife," responded Cicely; "and I claim to be acknowledged as your daughter."

There was a silence of upwards of a minute, during which Lord Mendlesham reflected deeply; but there was agitation in his thoughts, as was proved by his pale quivering lips. At length he said in a hoarse voice, "And if I refuse?"

"If you prove implacable, my lord," replied Cicely, "I also shall be implacable! Deal with me in a manner of becoming kindness; and there is no kindness that I will not show towards your daughter—who heaven knows is in need of much! But if you regard me as an enemy, then will you be provoking an hostility which on my side shall be merciless and terrible!"

"What, what do you require?—what, what do

you demand?" asked the nobleman, in a tremulous voice.

"I require and demand the same treatment at the hands of yourself and Lady Mendlesham as if I had been a bride of your own selection for your son Hector! I require that with the least possible delay you shall see Hector, receive him in your arms, and tell him that he is pardoned! I require your lordship and Lady Mendlesham to visit us at our house at Bayewater, and to make it known throughout the entire circle of your acquaintance that you are not merely reconciled to your son, but that on knowing your daughter-in-law, you find her to be in every way worthy of the family into which she has entered! As for money, I care nothing! I brought my husband thirty thousand pounds as a dowry; and at the death of my uncle, who is wealthy, I myself shall be rich. Now, my lord, you know my requirements and my demands:—are they to be conceded?"

The nobleman had found leisure during this long speech to ponder each detail as it progressed, and to make up his mind how to act. Accordingly, when Mrs. Hardress had finished, Lord Mendlesham at once said, "Cicely, I yield! I consent! I acknowledge you as my daughter-in-law. All you have asked shall be fulfilled!"

He presented his hand, which Cicely lightly touched with her lips: it was a mere form on her part—for she knew that this reconciliation was something extorted, and not a spontaneous effluence from any benevolent kindness on the part of the nobleman.

"It cannot be until to-morrow," he said, "that I may present you to your mother-in-law: for I have now a very painful task to perform—I must break to her the frightful intelligence you have brought—I dread the consequences—she will be overwhelmed with grief and despair! But does Hector already know everything?"

"He knows nothing, my lord," replied Cicely; "and if you desire it, he need never know of his sister's shame."

"In the name of heaven, keep it from him!" cried the nobleman, thankful for the assurance he thus received. "I know his fiery spirit—he would at once seek to inflict condign vengeance upon the villain Theodore Clifford——"

"Fear nothing, my lord," interrupted Cicely: "I promise you that Hector shall continue in ignorance of this calamity. But remember that to-morrow you are to see him; and it will be for yourself and Lady Mendlesham to maintain such a demeanour that he may suspect nothing."

"Yes, yes!—we must indeed dissimulate," replied the nobleman, "not only before him, but before the world likewise!"

After a little more conversation, Cicely took her departure from the mansion of her father-in-law; and re-entering the cab which had brought her thither, she ordered herself to be driven home. That interview with Lord Mendlesham had been a long one; and it was past seven o'clock when Cicely reached Bayewater. Hector had gone out to dine; and she patiently awaited his return. She had every reason to congratulate herself upon the success of her plans: the height of her ambition was attained—she was already acknowledged as Lord Mendlesham's daughter-in-law—on the

tomorrow the carriage of that nobleman and his wife would drive up to the house—and within a few days the entire aristocracy would learn that the reconciliation was complete. Then all the connexions and friends of the family would call to pay their respects to the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Hardress; and Cicely's pride would be in every sense vindicated and gratified. As she reviewed all the circumstances which had tended to elevate her to the pedestal on which she now found herself standing, she experienced a glow of exultation at the ingenuity with which she had combined her various plans, as well as at the indomitable perseverance with which she had carried them out. Although a woman, she felt proud of possessing the strength of the most masculine mind; and she had indeed good cause to exult in the energy of her character.

Hector returned home at about eleven o'clock, little suspecting the joyous tidings which awaited him. These were speedily imparted; and he embraced Cicely with a sincere fervour. She said nothing of his sister Josephine: she had arranged with Lord Mendlesham, previously to taking leave of him, a tale to account for the sudden change in the sentiments of himself and her ladyship. Hector was too much rejoiced to be very pointed in putting his questions as to the means by which the reconciliation had been brought about; and for the same reason he was easily satisfied with the explanations given by Cicely.

Everything took place according to the agreement made between Mrs. Hardress and Lord Mendlesham. That nobleman and his wife called on the following day; and within forty-eight hours it was known throughout the fashionable world that the family reconciliation was complete. The consequence was soon demonstrated by the stopping of numerous carriages at the door of the house at Bayewater; and the elegant *papier maché* tray on the table of Cicely's drawing-room was speedily filled with the cards of the *élite* of the nobility and gentry resident in London.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TREASURE.—THE ARRIVAL.

AGNES EVELYN—though overwhelmed with distress, on account of the discovery which she had made that her cousin Floribel was not united to Theodore Clifford in matrimonial bonds—did not however forget her sympathetic feelings on behalf of Winifred Barrington. She had from the very first believed that Winifred was innocent, though she was utterly unable to fix her suspicions on any one else as the murderer of Mrs. Chicklade. Agnes was a firm believer in the truths of religion and in providential intervention; and thus to her devout and confiding mind the acquittal of Winifred in the face of such strong circumstantial evidence, appeared to be heaven's own interposition on behalf of the innocent. Accordingly, no sooner was Winifred released from prison, than Agnes sent her a message desiring her to come to Sydney Villa; and she purposely prepared a considerable quantity of high-priced work to give to the poor

girl, as an excuse for providing her with the immediate means of a comfortable subsistence.

Winifred was not therefore compelled to seek in any other quarter for work; and setting herself to her task, she seemed to have relapsed into her former mode of life. So she had as far as industry went, and so far as paying the same devoted attention as ever to the wants of her grandfather: but in other respects Winifred was changed. The iron of misfortune had penetrated deeply into her soul, making a wound which could only be healed in time if the circumstances of her life progressed favourably, but which the slightest additional calamity would lay bare anew. That peniveness which had always characterized her countenance, had now deepened: her cheeks, always pale, were still more colourless than was their wont: a tear more frequently glided forth from her soft blue eye; and she had a slightly careworn look as if having recovered from a recent illness. She spoke less to Mrs. Slater, to her grandfather, or to whomsoever else she was brought in contact with; and her voice had a subdued and softly clouded tone, as if it had grown accustomed to keep back sighs. Indeed, it was impossible that any young female of Winnie's age could have gone through so much without experiencing the lingering influence of those dread misfortunes.

About three weeks had passed from the date of the trial: and it was now the end of November. One morning the post brought a letter, addressed to Winifred in the well-known handwriting of Gustavus; and her countenance became animated with joy. Be it recollected that she was utterly ignorant of the attraction which had detained Gustavus in Jamaica: she simply believed that he was waiting to obtain a passage as junior officer in a ship to bring him to England. With trembling hands she tore open the letter; and the feelings which she experienced on perusing it were of the strongest and most conflicting description. In that letter Gustavus told her how he had become possessed of a treasure, consisting of gold ore and dust worth about fourteen or fifteen thousand pounds; and all this treasure her cousin had sent home for the use of herself and her grandfather. It had been shipped to her: she was to be the recipient of it: for Gustavus expressed his conviction that she would use the little fortune in a manner most conducive to the interests of their venerable relative. Here was indeed joy for Winifred! She could scarcely believe her eyes—her brain reeled—and she would have fainted had she not exerted an almost preter-human power of self-command in order that she might finish the letter.

Then she went on to read how Gustavus had received from Mr. Pincock certain business-offers which would at once give him a good position, with perhaps a prospect of partnership in the worthy merchant's establishment; and how therefore he had decided for the present upon remaining altogether at Kingston. Gustavus in his letter dwelt somewhat emphatically upon having sent over the whole of the treasure to his cousin and grandfather; and the reader will comprehend the motives which influenced him at the time he had thus written, when he was endeavouring to place a salve upon his own conscience and quiet its qualms on account of the perfidy of which he more

or less felt himself to be guilty towards Winifred. But as Winnie now read this letter, she had not the slightest suspicion of any sinister or hidden design on the part of her cousin; and she therefore looked upon the transmission of the whole of the treasure as a proof of his unchangeable goodness of heart. Winifred was likewise of far too unselfish a disposition not to be rejoiced at the excellent prospects which Gustavus now had before him: yet on the other hand she naturally felt grieved at the idea that a lengthened period might elapse ere she again saw him. But then she said to herself, "And yet perhaps it is all for the better! Of me he must not think again as he may have been thinking! He will find a bride amongst the daughters of the rich planters of that island,—one whom he will not be ashamed to acknowledge as his wife, and against whom suspicion has never rested!"

It was a long time that morning before Winifred Berrington could even so far compose her feelings as to descend to Mrs. Slater's parlour and show her kind friend the letter. Indeed its contents were sufficient to upset the reason of that poor girl, who at the time she received it was working for her bread, and who thus suddenly found herself rich; for the treasure had been sent on board the same vessel which brought the letter, and therefore it was already in England. At length, however, Winifred sought her good friend Mrs. Slater; and when that worthy creature became acquainted with its contents, she seemed as if she could dance for joy. She instantaneously insisted that Winifred should hasten away to the prison and communicate the news to Mr. Berrington: but Winnie had already made up her mind to take the advice of her friends upon this point. She saw that Gustavus must have had strong motives in addressing the package to herself, and in so earnestly enjoining her to see that its contents were disposed of in a manner most beneficial to the old man; and her naturally quick intelligence had fathomed those motives.

"No," she said to Mrs. Slater; "I will not immediately show my grandfather this letter. In the first place it contains a piece of intelligence which must be broken delicately and by degrees to one of his age and shattered nerves; and in the second place, even if he survived the shock of joy, he would be for instantaneously expending this sum in the prosecution of the suit by which he hopes to gain a far larger fortune. I will go and consult Mr. Wardour."

Mrs. Slater recognised, when the exuberance of her joy was past, the sound sense of this reasoning; and it was agreed that the affair should in the meanwhile be kept a profound secret. Off went Winifred to Mr. Wardour's chambers; and she found that gentleman seated in his private room, at a table covered with briefs and law-books, all apparently in the most "admirable disorder." He received Winifred with kindness; and he was immediately struck by the animation which pervaded her countenance. She could not speak—she was gasping for breath under the influence of her varied feelings; but as she sank upon a seat, she handed him the letter.

He took and read it; and his own countenance speedily expanded with joy and satisfaction. Seizing Winifred's hand, he pressed it in warmest

congratulation: and then he said, "I think I understand, Miss Barrington, why you have come to consult me; and I feel flattered. We must sit down and discuss the business calmly and quietly."

Winifred could however, as the reader is already aware, tell Mr. Wardour very little concerning her grandfather's affairs: she did not even know at whose suit he was a prisoner, though she did not think that it was Sir John Dalham himself who had originally put him into gaol. Indeed, she was pretty sure that the cause of his arrest a quarter of a century back was in some way distinct from the lawsuit.

"Well, my dear girl," said Mr. Wardour, "I will institute private inquiries and ascertain what I can of the matter. I daresay that in the course of a few days I shall be enabled to obtain a complete insight into your grandfather's affairs, so far as the causes of his arrest and long detention are concerned. In the meanwhile keep your own secret; and when the package arrives from Liverpool, you can let me know. I will introduce you to an honest dealer in bullion who will give you the best price for your gold; and we will then invest the money in your name in the Bank of England, until we decide how it is to be disposed of."

Winifred thanked Mr. Wardour for his kind advice; and she was rising to depart, when he said, "You will not any longer work with your needle, Winifred? You had better let me become your temporary banker for such funds as you may require."

"Oh, no, sir!" she exclaimed: "and yet I thank you for your kindness! I shall make no alteration in my mode of life;—and perhaps indeed the whole of that money will be required to release my poor grandfather from prison!"

"Well, well," said Mr. Wardour, "we shall see:—and it was with a real paternal affection that he took her by the hand.

Winifred went forth from the barrister's chambers; and returning to her own lodgings, she sat down to her work—though she could not now progress so rapidly as was her wont; for her heart was full of joy at the idea that her old grandfather might possibly be soon freed from imprisonment. As for Mr. Wardour,—when Winifred had left him, indeed just as the door was closing behind her, he could not help ejaculating, "Admirable girl! you are truly one in a thousand! Nine hundred and ninety-nine out of that thousand, would have at once taken from me as much as I thought fit to advance—and would have set off to buy fine clothes and to enjoy a holiday. But you return to your needle; and you are afraid even of touching a shilling, lest there should not be sufficient left to effect the liberation of your grandfather!"

Three or four days passed, during which Winifred's looks greatly improved. She lost that careworn aspect which recent misfortunes had left behind: her step grew lighter—the tone of her voice more cheerful. She had fully resigned herself to what she deemed the necessity of thinking no more of Gustavus otherwise than as her very dear cousin; and resignation itself is mental placidity. But she had real causes for happiness: the prospects of Gustavus were excellent, according to the statements in his letter—and she herself possessed the means of either releasing her grand-
 father

from gaol, or at all events of surrounding him with every comfort and luxury for the remainder of his life.

It was in the forenoon, a few days after Winifred's interview with Mr. Wardour—and she was seated in her neatly furnished apartment, occupied with the work which Agnes Evelyn had supplied her. She was thinking of her grandfather and of Gustavus,—wondering how long it would be before Mr. Wardour would ascertain anything definitive respecting the position of the old man's affairs—wondering likewise whether her cousin would ever return to his native land, and if so, when she might expect to behold him again,—she was thus engaged in profound reflection, we say, when she heard a loud double knock at the front door. It was given as if by one who was either impatient or imperious; and therefore it startled her somewhat. Then she heard the front door open and shut; and then the hasty footsteps of a man were ascending the stairs. Who could this be? Not Mr. Dalham: his movements were slow and even languid—but these steps were now advancing rapidly! And they had passed the first landing: it was evidently towards Winifred's own apartments that the visitor was coming! Could it be Gustavus? No—utterly impossible! How absurd was the thought! But the door opened—and it was Gustavus who thus abruptly made his appearance!

"Winifred—dearest Winifred!"

"Gustavus—dearest Gustavus!"

These were the ejaculations which burst forth in a wild thrilling joy from the lips of the two cousins; and the next moment they were clasped in each other's arms. The tears streamed from the eyes of both: their very happiness took the semblance of a convulsing grief—for they sobbed and gave vent to short, broken, unintelligible ejaculations. Again and again did Gustavus strain Winifred to his breast; and Oh! how her heart throbbed and how her bosom palpitated as she received and gave back the fond fervid caresses that were lavished upon her! So ineffable, so ecstatic, so all-absorbing was the delight experienced by this youthful pair, that they thought not of anything beside the happiness of this meeting and that they were restored to each other. Gustavus forgot Emily Pinnoek as completely as if he had never known her; and Winifred forgot her vow to stifle her love for her cousin as completely as if she had never formed it!

At length what may be termed the delirious and almost frenzied violence of their joy began to abate. Winifred disengaged herself from her cousin's embrace—but taking his hand, she held it pressed between both her own, and she gazed upon him with all that fond interest which seeks to assure itself that the countenance which two years ago went away so handsome in its youthful beauty, had come back unmarred by any of the incidents through which the world-wide traveller had passed. And it was with a similar feeling that Gustavus contemplated Winifred; and satisfactory to both was this survey. Both had grown since the separation: the youth had become more manly—the girl more womanly; and the radiance of joy rendered each countenance more attractive and interesting in the eyes of the other.

Again they embraced; and then they sat down

—but with their hands still fast locked, as if they feared that by the loosening of those hands they might suddenly be separated again. But still their hearts were too full to give utterance to anything beyond a few broken and tremulously murmured ejaculations of endearment; and still they continued to gaze upon each other as if asking whether it was really possible that they were thus reunited, or whether it were all a dream?

It was a long time before their feelings grew sufficiently composed for deliberate discourse. At length Gustavus inquired concerning his old grandaunt; and then he asked whether Winifred had received his letter announcing the transmission of the treasure? She replied that she had, and that in the morning of this very same day she had received an advice from Liverpool to the effect that the case would be almost immediately sent off by luggage-train for London. Then there was a pause in the discourse; for Gustavus knew not how to commence any explanation of the cause of his sudden arrival in England—and Winifred knew not how to touch upon those recent misfortunes which would compel her likewise to give explanations. And yet neither noticed that there was any tincture of confusion or embarrassment in the manner of the other: it seemed to each as if the joy of this meeting had again put a seal upon the lips of the other,—a joy that was too deep to find utterance in continuous discourse!

At length Gustavus broke this silence by exclaiming, "Oh! my dearest, dearest Winifred, how terribly you must have suffered! It was on the tenth of November that I first read in the English newspapers of the frightful occurrence. That moment I departed from Jamaica, abandoning friends—prospects—everything, in order to hasten unto you!"

"Dearest Gustavus!—and you have done all this?" said Winifred, in a voice that was scarcely audible, so clouded was it with emotions. "Oh, you have sacrificed too much for my sake!"

"By heaven, darling Winnie, I would have sacrificed everything for your sake!—and I *did* sacrifice everything!" exclaimed the youth vehemently; but his words had a deeper meaning than his cousin suspected or than she could even possibly dream of. "But no matter! it was my duty—and I have performed it! Yes—not merely my duty, but my inclination likewise!—for Oh! not for worlds could I have abandoned you, my dear Winnie, when such hideous circumstances environed you!"—and again he pressed her to his heart.

"Oh, Gustavus," she murmured, "you must have believed me innocent—you must have thought me still worthy of your generous interest, to have done so much!"

"Innocent!" he ejaculated: "I knew that you were innocent! I would have doubted an angel from heaven if he had descended to tell me the contrary! But oh! the horrible anguish I endured for the first fortnight of the voyage homeward, until we met a ship from England:—and then how ineffable was my joy when I read in the newspapers with which the ship furnished us, that you had been acquitted! Then, dearest Winnie, instead of excruciating impatience it was all joyous impatience that I felt to reach my native

land—to fold you in my arms—to proclaim that I would never leave you again—but that henceforth you should ever have me with you as a defender and protector!"

Winifred was weeping softly yet plentifully; and now, with a sudden convulsing sob, she faltered forth, "But you have not resigned all those brilliant prospects——"

"I have resigned everything," ejaculated the youth,—"yes, everything, everything! And oh! let me never again think of Jamaica! In a word, let us not think of the past at all!—let us think only of the present and the future!"

Winifred was indescribably touched by the conduct of her cousin. There was much to explain relative to her own life since they had parted two years back, especially her connexion with Mrs. Chicklade; but he, without asking or awaiting the slightest explanation, treated her as one who could not be otherwise than pure, innocent, and immaculate: it was a blind confidence arising from the most magnanimous generosity. And Winifred, feeling that she *was* pure and chaste despite the ordeals through which she had passed—enjoying the consciousness of that virtue which had been preserved to her, in the hour of despair and temptation, by the generosity of Roderick Dalham—was enabled to look her cousin in the face while she reiterated her thanks for all the noble sacrifices which he had made upon her behalf. Then she gradually merged into explanations:—but can the reader blame her if she suppressed something which there was indeed no necessity to reveal? She did not state the precise truth in respect to the ring: she suffered Gustavus to understand that in the bitterness of her poverty she had sold that ring to Mrs. Chicklade whom she had accidentally met within the walls of the prison. She did not therefore reveal how it was that she had first encountered Roderick Dalham; but this circumstance she likewise attributed to an accident:—and then she expatiated fervidly upon the delicate generosity of that gentleman in supplying her with funds for the maintenance of her grandaunt. It was intelligible to Gustavus why Winifred had maintained so perilous a reserve in respect to her defence when upon her trial, from the fact of the absolute necessity of suppressing everything that might cause the name of Roderick Dalham to transpire. In a word, Gustavus beheld everything that was consistent and truthful in his cousin's narrative: he suspected not for a moment that there was the slightest suppression of facts or deviation from the precise line of sincerity: and he sighed inwardly as he thought that he was not enabled to deal with equal candour and frankness towards Winifred!

"And now, my dearest cousin," he said, "I must go and see our poor old grandaunt. But he must be prepared to receive me——And ah! when I bethink me, I have a letter for him—a letter from that strange gentleman, Mr. Hargrave, whom I mentioned in my letter, you know, as the principal author of the good fortune which overtook me in respect to the treasure."

"Mr. Hargrave?" said Winifred. "I never heard our grandfather mention such a name, nor state that he ever possessed such a friend or acquaintance. This letter, therefore——"

"I know not what it contains," replied Gustavus: "but I think it must be something important; for Mr. Hargrave is not a man to trifle away his time in writing letters of mere courtesy. Besides, I know from the conversations we had together that he was utterly unacquainted with our grandfather—However, we shall soon see what the nature of this communication is."

Winifred now explained to Gustavus the course she had adopted in consulting Mr. Wardour relative to old Mr. Barrington's affairs; and the youth highly approved of the proceeding—though indeed he was in that joyous state of mind which would have led him to approve of anything which his cousin might have done. And now worthy Mrs. Slater was informed of the return of Gustavus; and warm were the expressions of gratitude which the youth poured forth to that excellent friend whom his cousin Winnie had found so staunch and true in the time of her trouble.

The two cousins set off towards Whitecross Street; and on reaching the prison Gustavus remained in the lobby while Winifred entered to seek her grandfather and break to him gradually the fact of his grandson's return to England. We need not dwell upon this portion of our narrative: suffice it to say that Winifred conducted the proceeding with all suitable delicacy—and that the old man, being duly prepared, was conducted to the private room adjoining the lobby, where he was speedily folded in the arms of his grandson. The joy of Mr. Barrington took as childlike a complexion as when he embraced Winifred after her acquittal. He whimpered and sobbed; and he overwhelmed the youth with a thousand questions, interjecting numberless comments upon the progress of his own lawsuit, and assuring his two grandchildren over and over again that they should shortly ride in their carriage. After a while Gustavus produced the letter which had been confided to him by Mr. Hargrave, accompanying the proceedings with a few brief explanations of how it came into his hand.

"Read it—read it, my dear boy," said the old man nervously. "It is perhaps some friend who is sending me important information to be embodied in an affidavit; and if so, we must have Timperley here at once."

"Stop, my dear grandfather!—not so fast!" interrupted Gustavus, with a good-humoured tone and smile. "Let us first see what Mr. Hargrave says."

"Yes, yes—read it," said the old man, with nervous impatience.

Gustavus accordingly opened the letter; and he read its contents, which ran as follows:—

"Mr. Barrington will pardon a complete stranger for venturing to proffer his advice on a certain point; but this advice which he has to give, is so vitally important to Mr. Barrington's interests that Mr. Hargrave feels it a bounden duty to lose no time in affording it. Besides, Mr. Hargrave has experienced so deep an interest in Mr. Barrington's chivalrous-minded and high-souled grandson Gustavus, that it is impossible to feel otherwise than interested also in every one connected with that upright, virtuous youth. But now to the point. If the attorney to whom Mr. Barrington's affairs are entrusted be that same Mr. Timperley

who many years back was a clerk in the employment of Mr. Joshua Waldron of Lincoln's Inn Fields—then that Mr. Timperley is a villain of the blackest dye. There is no duplicity, treachery, deceit, or wickedness of which he is not capable. Mr. Hargrave is no traducer nor scandaliser: nor would he be for the world speak without just grounds for the strong aspersion which he thus throws upon the character of that man. Let Mr. Barrington beware!

"Mr. Hargrave earnestly entreats that this letter may be thrown into the fire the moment it shall have been read. He also begs that in whatsoever course Mr. Barrington may adopt towards Mr. Timperley, no syllable of allusion may be made to the source whence the warning has emanated. In a word, Mr. Hargrave is inspired only by the feelings of friendship and duty in the measure which he is now taking; and he therefore relies upon Mr. Barrington's honour for inviolable secrecy on the points where silence is enjoined."

Such were the contents of the letter which Gustavus read aloud to his grandfather and Winifred. Consternation seized upon the young couple when the villainous character of Timperley was so boldly proclaimed; but a terrible excitement took possession of the old man.

"Timperley a villain?" he cried, wringing his hands; "and I so completely in his power! But no—it cannot be!"

"It is! it is!" exclaimed Gustavus: "I am convinced that Mr. Hargrave is incapable of stating an untruth! Ah! now I remember, he once or twice spoke with exceeding bitterness of all lawyers—"

"Do not give way to grief, dear grandfather," said Winifred, throwing her arms about the old man's neck. "I have not told you before—but there is a kind friend at work for you—Mr. Wardour I mean—his attorneys are respectable—and now that you must at once break off with Mr. Timperley, you shall see those lawyers—you shall see Mr. Wardour—and they will advise you how to proceed."

While Winifred was thus speaking, with her arms folded about the old man's neck and her plump youthful cheek resting against his wrinkled, almost fleshless face, many thoughts came trooping in unto his mind.

"Yes, yes," he said, in the nervous querulous voice with which old age expresses its excited feelings; "it is so! it must be so! Timperley is a villain! For years and years has the suit dragged on!—for eighteen years it has been in his hands! I have always told him his affidavits were not strong enough—delays which never ought to have occurred were constantly arising—sometimes the counsel he employed was ill—at other times he broke down for want of facts which ought to have been supplied! Yes, yes—I see it all! I have been betrayed—sold—kept here like a felon to rot for a lifetime in gaol—crushed—trampled upon—Oh, my God! it is fearful!"

And if all this were fearful, so was the excitement of the old man as he rose from his seat and paced to and fro in the apartment,—at one moment sobbing and whimpering, then beating his breast or wringing his hands, and giving vent to vehement ejaculations. The affectionate grand-

children experienced the greatest difficulty in tranquillizing their aged relative : but at length they succeeded, though only by dint of the solemn promise that they would go off to Mr. Wardour and consult him in respect to the best means of getting rid of Mr. Timperley without delay. They accordingly departed for this purpose : but before they left the room where this scene took place, Gustavus threw Mr. Hargrave's letter into the fire which was burning there.

This matter was accordingly put into an immediate train for final arrangement, under the auspices of Mr. Wardour, who introduced the two cousins to the eminent firm of Chancery solicitors into whose hands he recommended that the business should be transferred ; and it was an understood thing that Mr. Timperley should be called upon to give up without delay all the papers and documents in his possession connected with the case of "Barrington v. Dalham." The new solicitors undertook to settle Mr. Timperley's bill of costs, if he should venture to send in such an account, he having all along agreed to conduct the suit as a matter of speculation, himself to be paid only in the eventuality of success : for the reader has already seen that he could very well afford to make such a compact, inasmuch as he was better paid by Sir John Dalham to protract the suit than he could possibly have been by Mr. Barrington for bringing it to a close.

Having transacted their business according to the promise made to their grandfather, the two cousins proceeded to report the issue to the old man—with whom they dined in the prison ; for this was a gala-day to celebrate the return of Gustavus, and Winifred took care that the festival should be a bounteous one. On leaving the prison at about five o'clock in the afternoon, the cousins returned to Mrs. Slater's house, to inquire if the package containing the treasure had arrived ?—and they received a negative answer. Gustavus at once suggested that as the package was to come by the luggage-train, according to the advice which Winifred had received from the shipping-agents at Liverpool, it might be a considerable time on the way ; and on its arrival in London it might remain for awhile at the terminus before the carriers' waggon would bring it down to Aldersgate Street. Therefore, all things considered, it was plain they could not well expect it until the morrow.

Gustavus had now to seek out a lodging for himself, as his sense of delicacy told him that he could not with propriety dwell beneath the same roof with Winifred ; and moreover Mrs. Slater had really no accommodation for him. But a lodging was soon found in the same street, and at that worthy woman's recommendation ; so that this little matter was quickly settled. And now, on that evening, while seated together, Gustavus began to broach to his cousin a subject on which his mind was bent and his resolve taken.

"I am restored to you, dearest Winifred," he said, pressing her hand fondly and gazing tenderly upon her countenance : "I am come to be your defender and your protector, that you shall no longer be alone in the world, to encounter its perils and to be the victim of its calamities. Whatever misery as well as whatever happiness there may be in store for us, we shall share together——"

"No, dearest Gustavus," replied Winifred, gently disengaging her hand, and bending down her looks, over which an expression of anguish flitted ; "it must not be ! To you am I as a sister : to me you are as a very dear brother !"

"Winifred !" ejaculated the youth, smitten with surprise and grief at a strain of language which he had so little expected from her lips : "what mean you ?—why cannot this be ?"

"Because—because," replied the weeping girl, shuddering as if all the ice-chill of December which prevailed out of doors, had suddenly concentrated its bitterness to smite her to the very heart's core,—"because, Gustavus, I have been in a prison—my name is rendered notorious—and though acquitted, yet there may be some—My God ! it is possible !—who believe me guilty !"

A convulsive sob for an instant choked her utterance ; and Gustavus was about to break in with vehement ejaculations, when she placed her finger upon his lip and said, "Hear me, my dear cousin—hear me, I beseech you ! This that you demand must not be. Whoever passes through the ordeal of a felons' gaol, although subsequently proven innocent, nevertheless has a taint upon the reputation which no jury's verdict nor judicial decision can ever wipe away."

"Winifred, you are driving me mad !" exclaimed Gustavus vehemently. "But answer me, my sweet cousin," he said, suddenly assuming a milder manner and a softer tone, for he saw that he had affrighted her : "tell me, Winifred—do you love me ?"

"Oh, God knows how deeply and how fondly I love you, Gustavus !" she replied, clasping her hands in anguish at the thought that happiness was within her reach, and yet that she dared not accept it !

"Oh, you love me !—thank heaven that you love me !" exclaimed the youth : "but yet I never doubted it ! You shall be mine, Winifred !—you cannot refuse to bestow your hand upon one who has made every species of sacrifice for you !"—and here a ghastly expression of remorseful anguish for a moment swept over his countenance : but Winifred observed it not, for at the time her looks were bent downwards—a violent struggle was taking place within her.

"Gustavus," she at length said, in a low deep voice, "I had intended it should be otherwise—but after all you have done—after the sacrifices you have made on my behalf—you have a right to command—and I obey !"

A wild cry of joy burst from the youth's lips ; and the image of Emily Pinnock, which for a moment had risen up before his mental vision, was again forgotten in the fulness of his present happiness. He strained his cousin to his breast ; and as Winifred's head reposed upon his shoulder, she said, "But are you sure, Gustavus, that the day can never, never come when you will repent of this ? Suppose that our grandsire should become rich, and that he should leave us wealthy—will not your spirit be chafed and your soul be galled if you see the world looking coldly on your wife ?"

"Coldly ? it is impossible !" ejaculated Gustavus. "You are innocent, Winifred—and that is sufficient ! If the world look coldly upon an innocent person, the sooner we renounce such a

world and trust to our own domestic hearth *only* for happiness, the better! You shall be mine!—and with the least possible delay shall I acquire a legal right to defend and protect you!”

Could Winifred offer a remonstrance against her cousin's generous purpose? could she refuse her assent to become his wife? No!—such a course on her part would have been contrary to human nature; and she was but a mere mortal after all.

On the following day, at about one o'clock, the cousins repaired to the prison; and Gustavus requested the grandfather's assent to his union with Winifred. Now for the first time a hint was dropped to the old man that there was some little ready money to which the family could look as a resource, and which Gustavus had obtained in Jamaica. To be brief, Mr. Barrington cheerfully gave his assent to the marriage of his grandchildren: indeed, the poor old man was in many respects well-nigh childish—and he would have refused his assent to nothing which they might ask of him, so long as their demands did not touch upon his stubborn notions with regard to his lawsuit.

Gustavus and Winifred remained with their grandfather until about five o'clock, when they took leave of him. As they were about to issue from the prison, the turnkey at the outer gate said to Winifred, “I think, Miss, you will find a young lady waiting for you at your lodgings when you get back.”

“Indeed!” ejaculated Winnie. “Why do you think so?”

“I will tell you,” answered the turnkey. “It was just about one o'clock—was it not? when you and Mr. Gustavus came this afternoon. Well then, it must have been about half-past one that a young lady came to the gate——”

“Please to describe her,” said Winifred, with a faint suspicion that it might possibly be Agnes Evelyn who had called for some benevolent purpose.

“That would be rather difficult, Miss,” rejoined the turnkey; “for she had a very thick veil over her face; so that in plain terms I couldn't so much as catch the least glimpse of her countenance. But she had a very pleasant voice—she put three or four questions to me about Mr. Barrington—she evidently knew everything concerning his long imprisonment. I told her that you, Mr. Gustavus, had just returned home from abroad; and I said that in point of fact you were both at that moment with your grandfather, and that you were likely to remain inside the walls till five o'clock.”

“And what did the young lady say?” inquired Winifred.

“She said she should like to see you, Miss,” continued the turnkey; “but she would not suffer you to be disturbed while you were with your grandfather. She asked me where you lodged; I told her—and she declared her intention of going and waiting for you at your apartments. She expressly desired that no intimation of her visit to the prison should be made to either of you in the meanwhile; and so I did not think it necessary to send in word that the young lady had been. But I suppose you will find her at your lodgings——”

“How do you know that she is young?” inquired Winifred.

“Trust me to tell that much by a woman's figure and voice!” responded the turnkey, with a smile. “Well, as I was about to say, the young lady thanked me for my civility, and tripped lightly away.”

“It is doubtless Miss Evelyn,” said Winifred to her cousin, as they proceeded along the street. “And yet it is strange that she should have inquired my address; for her housekeeper Rachel has been to me——”

“Miss Evelyn may have forgotten it,” answered Gustavus; “and that perhaps is the very reason why she called at the prison.”

“Oh! if it should be Miss Evelyn,” exclaimed Winifred, “I shall be so annoyed to think of her being kept waiting for nearly four mortal hours at my lodgings! I will hasten home as quick as ever I can.”

Gustavus conducted Winifred to the door of Mrs. Slater's house, where he left her, as he did not think it proper to intrude upon the interview which might be about to take place between his cousin and Miss Evelyn, or whosoever the visitress should be. Immediately on entering, Winifred said to the servant of the lodging-house, “Is there a lady waiting for me, Mary?”

“A lady has called, Miss—but she is not waiting,” responded the servant-maid.

“Who was she? and what did she say?” inquired Winifred hastily.

“I don't know who she was, Miss: she gave no name—but she seemed to know you very well, and all about you, as well as your grandfather and Mr. Gustavus. She spoke very kindly——”

“Did you see her face?” asked Winifred.

“No, Miss,” rejoined Mary: “she wore a thick dark veil——”

“And she left no message?” demanded Winifred.

“I was going to tell you, Miss. She first asked if you were at home; and when I said you were not, she observed that she thought so, as she had reason to believe that you were at the prison. Then she said she would sit down in your room and wait till your return. I told her it was likely you would not be in till five; and I offered to run and fetch you. She said she did not mind waiting, and that I was by no means to disturb you while you were with your grandfather. So I showed her up to your room; and there she sat down. But in about ten minutes I heard her descending the stairs—she told me she had changed her mind—she would not wait, but that she would call again to-morrow at one o'clock punctually.”

Winifred thought that it must be either Miss Evelyn, or else some lady who on the recommendation of Agnes had come with a benevolent intention of giving her work. She therefore resolved to be at home on the morrow to receive the visitress, whoever she might be, at one o'clock. Gustavus returned shortly after six to take his tea with Winifred; and as the case containing the treasure had not as yet been delivered, they resolved to repair to the railway station in the morning to make inquiries for it.

At nine o'clock on the following day Gustavus arrived to breakfast with Winifred; and when the repast was finished, they prepared to set off to the station in Euston Square.



JOSEPHINE.

"By the bye, Winnie, you had better take with you the letter of advice which you received from the agents at Liverpool," said Gustavus; "for it will establish your identity as the person who alone has a right to receive the package."

Winifred accordingly looked in her workbox for the letter which she had deposited there: but it was not to be found. She searched elsewhere: still no letter was to be discovered. She grew frightened, and began blaming herself for carelessness in having perhaps left it lying about, instead of placing it, as she thought, in her workbox: but Gustavus reassured her by exclaiming, "It is of little consequence, Winnie. Your identity is easily established in case of need; and moreover I can prove that I was the person who through Mr. Pinnock's agency consigned the case to your name in London."

The cousins accordingly took a cab: and they proceeded to Euston Square. On making an in-

quiry of the first official whom they met at the railway-station, they were referred to a clerk in the Goods' Department. This place was so little accessible to females, encumbered with merchandise as it was, that Gustavus left Winifred on the passengers' platform while he went to prosecute the inquiry. On finding the clerk whom he sought, he said, "I have called about a case which ought to have arrived from Liverpool yesterday or the day before, directed to Miss Barrington, No. —, Aldersgate Street."

"I recollect something about that case," replied the clerk, turning over the leaves of a book in a quick business-like manner. "Barrington you say was the name? Is it Winifred Barrington?"

"The very same," responded Gustavus.

"Well then, it's all right," continued the clerk: "here's the signature in the books—and the case was fetched away yesterday afternoon."

"What?" ejaculated Gustavus, in surprise

mingled with alarm. "There must be some mistake——"

"No mistake, sir, I can assure you," replied the clerk. "I now recollect perfectly!—the young lady showed me the letter of advice——"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Gustavus: "the letter of advice?"

"Yes, sir. But I hope there's nothing wrong: for though the case seems to have been shipped from Jamaica as containing pickles, it was in reality a box of gold dust—as the Custom House officers discovered at Liverpool. But it was cleared by the agents, and all charges were paid——You look ill, sir?"

"Ill?" repeated Gustavus, with a bewildered vacancy; and he felt that his brain was reeling.

"I hope to God there is nothing wrong?" again said the clerk, now looking frightened. "Here is the signature—it was a dusky young lady—very handsome——"

"Ah!" gasped Gustavus: for at the same moment that this description was given of her, his eye settled upon the signature of *Winifred Barrington* in the book which the clerk presented to him, and he recognised the handwriting only too well!

"Really, sir, you begin to alarm me most seriously," said the clerk. "It is quite evident——"

"No, no—do not be alarmed!" interrupted Gustavus, with a preterhuman effort regaining somewhat of his lost self-possession. "I see that it is all right. Do you know where the lady lives?"

"Oh, yes—to be sure! It is in the book there——"

"Ah! certainly! I quite forgot! Aldersgate Street, of course! Pray forgive me for the trouble I have occasioned—but it is a family matter——"

"Well, sir," exclaimed the clerk, in haste to get about some other business, "as long as there's nothing wrong so far as we are concerned——"

"Oh, nothing, nothing—I can assure you!" rejoined Gustavus: and like a drunken man he reeled away.

He speedily encountered Winifred on the platform where he had left her; and she was at once struck by his altered appearance; for his countenance was haggard and ghastly to a degree. The very natural idea that smote her was that something had occurred in respect to the treasure; and smitten with commiseration on her cousin's account, she said emphatically, "Whatever has happened, dear Gustavus, do not give way to despair!"

He tried to speak—but he could afford utterance to nothing intelligible: he merely gasped forth a few inarticulate sounds; for there was madness in his brain and sickness in his heart. Giving his arm to Winifred, he hurried her out of the station, into the cab which was waiting for them.

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver, who could not help perceiving that something had happened.

Gustavus threw himself back in the vehicle, as if utterly crushed by the tremendous sense of calamity; and Winifred, seeing that it was of no use to question him, said to the driver, "Back to Aldersgate Street."

The cab rolled away; and Winifred drew down the blinds—for Gustavus was now sobbing and weeping bitterly. That the treasure was lost,

Winnie felt only too well persuaded; and thinking that it was this—and this alone—which so affected her cousin, she entreated him to be comforted.

"It is only for our poor grandfather's sake that I myself am distressed," said Winifred: "for to me it is just the same to work for my bread in future as I have hitherto done. And you, Gustavus, are young—and there are plenty of situations which you can obtain——"

"Oh, Winifred dearest!" he murmured; "you know not how wretched I am!"—and he literally wrung his hands in despair.

"For God's sake compose yourself, Gustavus!" she said. "Surely, surely all hope need not be abandoned? The police-authorities may be appealed to——"

"No, no—it is useless!" he vehemently ejaculated. "A vile trick has been played us——"

"Ah! perhaps that letter which was lost in my room," said Winnie, now thinking that after all the blame would redound upon herself, "is in some way connected——"

"No, no—do not in any sense yield to self-reproach!" said Gustavus. "Look you, dear Winifred!" he continued, seeing the absolute necessity of exercising a mastery over his emotions, lest he should suddenly let fall from his lips some word that would excite suspicion. "There is a deep mystery in all this—for the present we must say nothing about it—not even to Mrs. Slater nor to Mr. Wardour—and thank God, our grandfather knows naught concerning it! But the railway authorities will investigate——"

"Then there is still hope!" interjected Winifred: "and you, my dear cousin, must not despair. Do you know that for an instant I was wondering whether the visit of that young lady yesterday could have anything to do with the matter—especially as she was alone in my room for a little while—and I am almost convinced I saw that letter safe in my workbox in the forenoon yesterday."

"Nothing can be more likely!" ejaculated Gustavus, catching at an idea which had just struck him—or rather suddenly resolving upon a particular plan to be carried out. "Unprincipled people are full of all kinds of wicked devices in London——"

"Ah! if I thought there was any wickedness in that strange visit yesterday," said Winifred, "how truly distressed should I be that I left the letter in my unlocked workbox."

"Again I conjure you not to reproach yourself," interrupted Gustavus. "I tell you what we must do. But will you be entirely guided by me?"

"Oh, yes, Gustavus! Can you doubt it?" asked Winifred affectionately.

"These sorts of robberies," he continued, "are often perpetrated with the hope of obtaining a good large sum for the restoration of the stolen property: because it is scarcely probable that the thieves in the present instance could go and dispose of their plunder. Well, then, if for argument's sake that lady should call again—for the more I think of it, the more I am convinced she was an accomplice in the villainous transaction, as the disappearance of the letter proves—let me be at your lodgings to receive her. If she should

really be either Miss Evelyn or any other lady on legitimate business, I can apologize for your absence—I can state that I am your cousin—and I can send and fetch you.”

So great had been the grief of Gustavus that Winifred was ready and willing to do anything she could to tranquillize his mind; and she was moreover so much unnerved herself that she did not perceive the somewhat absurd sophistry of his reasoning. Therefore, so soon as they reached Aldersgate Street, she suffered him to escort her (the cab being dismissed) as far as Whitecross Street Prison; and he left her with an injunction that she was to remain there until he either sent for her or came to rejoin her. They thus temporarily separated; and Gustavus proceeded to Mrs Slater's: for it was now verging towards one o'clock—the hour when the veiled young lady had said she would repeat her visit.

On entering the lodging-house, Gustavus said to the maid-servant, “If that young lady who called yesterday, should come again, she may doubtless ask for my cousin. Request her at once to walk up-stairs—do not say that Miss Barrington is out—and do not mention my name. I know what it all means—it is a little matter which requires to be conducted thus carefully.”

Mary promised compliance; and Gustavus ascended to his cousin's apartment. It would be impossible to describe the agony of mind experienced by this wretched young man. Emily Pinnoek was in London!—she was evidently armed with terribly resolute purposes; for she had already been at work with a fatal activity; and that she now meant to reveal everything to Winifred, was only too apparent! Gustavus walked to and fro in his cousin's room, at one time like a lion chafing in his cage—at another like a despairing wretch who was on the point of being dragged forth to the place of execution. At one moment his countenance was flushed with a vivid fever-heat: then his face became ghastly and his features all distorted. Thus half an-hour passed: some adjacent church clock struck one—and then a double knock resounded through the house. Gustavus heard the front door open and shut: then his ears caught the tread of female footsteps, accompanied by the rustling of garments, ascending the stairs;—and then those steps ceased just outside the door of the room.

That door was opened; and a form, well known though closely veiled, entered the apartment.

“Ah! is it you?” ejaculated Emily Pinnoek, in a low half-suppressed tone: and glancing round to assure herself that the maid-servant had retired, she threw back the veil from her countenance of dusky beauty.

She quickly ascertained—from some remarks which caught her ear in respect to the mail-steamer which brought Gustavus—that she was thus close upon his track; and as there were several Transatlantic packets unloading at the time, she looked about to see if by any possibility she could discover him. While thus engaged, she caught sight of a package which she full well recognised; for she herself had helped Gustavus to stow the box of gold therein, instead of the jars of pickles and preserves which it was supposed at Mount Pleasant had been bought for that purpose. She could not see the direction upon it as it happened to be turned downward: neither did she exactly remember what address Gustavus had written on it at the time: but she knew that old Mr. Barrington was in Whitecross Street Prison; and thus she felt sure that on her arrival in London she should be enabled to find a clue to the whereabouts of her perfidious fugitive lover. When she thus caught sight of the package, no ulterior idea entered her mind; and if she contemplated it attentively for a few minutes, it was only because it was something which was so intimately associated with the faithless one whom she had come to seek.

Not perceiving Gustavus anywhere about, she was even angry with herself at having for a moment yielded to the idea that he might be still in Liverpool.

“No, no!” she said bitterly to herself: “he is on his road to see and console his Winifred, who will now become all the more dear to him since she is acquitted!”—for the intelligence of the trial's result had already been made known to Emily Pinnoek, in a way similar to that by means of which Gustavus himself had obtained the knowledge while yet upon the high sea.

The beautiful quadron now determined to proceed to London; and having made inquiries relative to the trains, she repaired to the railway-station. This was the first time she had ever been in England: everything was therefore completely novel to her in this country: but her demeanour was such as to lead a stranger to suppose that she was labouring not under the slightest embarrassment or feeling of awkwardness, but that she was perfectly well acquainted with English customs, circumstances, and affairs. She had all her self-possession about her; and as she was anxious to avoid the proffer of assistance or advice on the part of strangers, she was careful to assume an air best calculated to repel any such overture.

Now, it happened that in her anxiety to be in full time for the train, she was a good half-hour beforehand; and thus she had ample time to survey the station, and watch the progress of all those gigantic and bustling arrangements which are associated with railways. While thus looking about her, Emily was suddenly called upon to stand out of the way while a large wain, laden with packages of all descriptions, drew up at a particular spot to be unloaded. As Emily watched the process of rapidly discharging that waggon of its contents, she caught sight of the well-known case which contained the treasure of ore and gold-dust. At that moment a young man, with the air and bustling habits of a clerk, came hastening to the spot where the waggon was being unloaded; and seeing the guard of a train standing near, he in-

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE QUADRON IN LONDON.

EMILY PINNOCK had left Kington in a steam-packet which started on the second day after the departure of the one in, which Gustavus was a passenger: but inasmuch as the former was somewhat swifter than the other, it reached Liverpool but a few hours later than the rival vessel.

quired, "Do you belong to the luggage-train that is going to take all these goods?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Then have the kindness to keep a special eye on this case," said the young man, whom we may as well observe was a clerk to the shipping-agents to whose care the case had been consigned by Mr. Pincock. "We have already written to advise the party in London of its arrival at Liverpool, and that it would be sent on with the least possible delay: but you had better tell your people at Euston Square that the case is only to be given up to the party on our letter being shown: for, I repeat, it is important to be careful in this matter."

"I will attend to it," answered the guard of the luggage-train. "I suppose that the case contains—"

"Hush! no matter!" said the clerk: and then he whispered something in the guard's ear.

But at this moment the bell rang as a summons for the passenger-train which was about to start; and Emily Pincock hastened to take her seat in a first-class carriage. There were some other lady-travellers in the same compartment: but Emily maintained a most reserved silence throughout the journey; for she had read of the numerous stratagems, tricks, and devices by which unprincipled persons, with fair-seeming exteriors, entrapped the unwary in England; and she was resolved to be constantly on her guard.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when Emily Pincock reached the great metropolis. She had already learnt, at the hotel where she temporarily stopped at Liverpool, the address of a respectable family-hotel in London; and taking a cab at the station, she ordered the driver to proceed thither. In about twenty minutes the cab reached the hotel; and Emily alighted. A couple of idle street-boys who were loitering near—observing the quadroon's dusky complexion, and taking her to be some foreign lady whom they might make their victim—rushed forward as if to render an officious assistance. One caught up her trunk and was rushing with it into the hotel for the purpose of diverting her attention from the proceedings of his companion, who was at the instant endeavouring to dive his hand into Emily's pocket with a view to her purse. But at that instant the waiter and porter came forth to receive the lady; so that the boy bearing the trunk was quickly relieved of his burden; and a gentleman coming along the street, collared the other active youth, who was at the very moment gliding away with Emily's purse in his possession. This gentleman had at a glance fathomed the proceeding;—and to make the young thief surrender the purse, and then to consign him to the care of a policeman, was now the work of but a few moments. Indeed, it was all done before Emily was scarcely aware of the risk she had incurred of being deprived of her well-filled purse. She now expressed her warm thanks to the gentleman,—whom on thus addressing, she found to be a person of about forty years of age, good-looking, and handsomely appressed. He bowed courteously to her, and sternly reproached the cabman for not taking more care of the young lady, and for suffering her thus to be mobbed as it were by boys whose very appearance denoted their calling. The cabman grumbled out some excuse, received his

fare, mounted the box, and drove off. The gentleman, struck by the remarkably handsome countenance and superb figure of the quadroon, would fain have lingered in discourse with her, that he might improve the acquaintance which accident had enabled him to form: but with a graceful salutation, and a few more words of thanks for the service he had rendered her, Emily passed into the hotel.

She was conducted to a private apartment; and as the dusk set in very early at that December season of the year, she resolved to wait until the morrow's daylight before she took any farther step in pursuance of the designs which had brought her to England: for the little incident at the door of the hotel had tended to confirm her resolve to be constantly on her guard against the perils and iniquities to be encountered by a stranger in the British metropolis. The voyage across the Atlantic had left behind it so strange and disagreeable a swimming in the head, that everything appeared to be moving up and down in Emily's imagination. It was so in the railway-train—it was now so in her apartment at the hotel. She felt indisposed; and she retired to rest at a very early hour in the evening. But it was a long time before the quadroon could compose herself to sleep. The bed in which she lay seemed to be heaving up and down, thus producing a most sickening and unpleasant sensation; while her thoughts were likewise of a nature calculated to keep her awake. She was now in the same metropolis with her faithless lover: she felt convinced that he *was* in London! Perhaps within the lapse of a few hours she should see him?—and perhaps within the same space her own fate would be decided, whether she should succeed in wooing him back to her arms, or whether she should be compelled to punish his infidelity by means of a deadly vengeance?

It was not until deep in the night that slumber stole upon the eyes of Emily Pincock; and thoroughly exhausted both in mind and body, she slept until a late hour in the forenoon. Indeed it was past eleven o'clock when she awoke; and consulting her watch, she was surprised at the length of time she had slept. Starting from the couch, she performed her toilet. The dizzy sensation had now entirely passed away from her brain: she felt well in health, and resolute in all her purposes. Having partaken of breakfast, she desired the waiter of the hotel to purchase her the best Guide to London, alleging that her object was to obtain suggestions for visiting the principal sights and objects of interest; and her order was speedily executed. The little book thus furnished her, was a complete gazetteer in its way: it contained descriptions of prisons as well as of palaces; and thus Emily Pincock quickly ascertained the whereabouts of the gaol in which old Mr. Barrington was confined. Taking a cab, she proceeded into the neighbourhood of Whitecross Street Prison: and dismissing the vehicle, she drew her thick veil closely over her countenance. In a few minutes she reached the gate of the prison, where it was her object to make certain inquiries, so that she might be thereby guided in the course which she should subsequently pursue. As the reader has already seen, Emily was informed by the turnkey that Gustavus and Winifred were at that very

time in the prison with the old man, and that there they were likely to remain until five o'clock. Emily had no desire to create a scene within the walls of that establishment: neither did she choose that any message should be sent in to Winifred, for fear lest on coming to answer it she might be accompanied by Gustavus—in which case the scene would occur in the street. Therefore Emily, on ascertaining where Winifred lodged—for this was the principal object of her inquiries—remunerated the turnkey for his civility, and hastened to Aldersgate Street.

On arriving at Mrs. Slater's house, Emily, as we have seen, decided upon waiting in Winifred's apartment until her return. Thither she was accordingly shown by the maid-servant Mary. All this while Emily had carefully concealed her countenance; for she did not wish Gustavus to obtain the slightest hint of her presence in England, for fear lest in his desperation he should flee away, as in a similar state of mind he had fled from Jamaica. It was her plan that the revelation of her presence should strike him with the suddenness of a blow, so that the matter between them might be at once brought to a crisis.

Emily found herself alone in Winifred's apartment. She sat down—gazed about her—and said to herself, "It is here that my rival lives. Ah, my rival!—but how long shall she remain so? Must not this day decide *her* fate and *mine*? If in the first instance I meet her alone—as I hope to do—I will tell her everything, so that she may at once discard from her heart that youth who has evidently at one time been as faithless towards her as he has since proved faithless towards me. Then, if everything be suddenly brought to an end betwixt Gustavus and Winifred, he can have no earthly excuse for not fulfilling his oath and his duty, his pledges and his obligations, towards myself! But if, on the other hand, the two cousins shall presently return together—and if I must confront them both at once—it will serve my purpose just as well; for I shall mercilessly unmask Gustavus and proclaim everything in the presence of his cousin Winifred!"

Such were the reflections and such the plans of Emily Pincock, during the first ten minutes that she found herself alone in Winifred's apartment. As she gazed about her, the idea stole into her mind that it would be expedient, if possible, to discover beforehand the real sentiments of Gustavus towards Winifred,—whether he had hurried off from Jamaica to England solely under the influence of the horror produced on his mind by the sudden discovery of her frightful position, and thus with the mere intention of succouring her—or whether it were obedient to the impulse of a resuscitated and weakened love. If Emily could only find any of the letters which Gustavus had written from Kingston to Winifred, her uncertainty on these points would be set at rest. She was alone in that room:—why should she not institute a search? No sooner thought of than done! There was the workbox upon the table; and this was the very first object of her investigation. Ah, there was a letter! What was it? Not from Gustavus—not from Kingston! No—but from Liverpool!—the very letter of which she had heard a clerk of the shipping-agents speak to the guard of the luggage-train! An idea flashed

to Emily's mind: she possessed herself of the letter—and then hastened from the house, leaving with the servant-maid a message to the effect that she would return on the morrow at one o'clock. Taking a cab in Aldersgate Street, Emily ordered the driver to proceed to the Euston Square terminus.

From the conversation which she had overheard at the railway-station at Liverpool, as well as from the contents of the letter which she now had in her possession, Emily Pincock comprehended how easy it would be to obtain possession of the treasure. This would be a most important point for the quadron to gain: it would be giving her an immense advantage over Gustavus;—while, on the other hand, she felt perfectly convinced that after everything which had taken place between them, he would never dare employ legal measures of coercion. With a heart thus exulting in anticipated triumph, Emily Pincock reached Euston Square; and now she composed her countenance for the part she had to perform. She likewise raised her veil; for she felt that any appearance of concealment or extreme reserve might only tend to engender suspicion. On making an inquiry, she was directed to the Goods' Department; and there she addressed herself to the clerk whose duty it was to attend to business of this description.

"I have called concerning a case which I expect from Liverpool," said Emily, in a tone of calm confidence, "and which was originally shipped at Kingston."

"What name, ma'am?" inquired the clerk, struck by the beauty of the quadron.

"Perhaps I should do well to show you a letter which I have received from the agents at Liverpool:"—and Emily at once produced the document to which she alluded.

"Ah, I recollect!" said the clerk, who had received an intimation from the guard of the luggage-train relative to that particular case. "You, then, I presume, are Miss Barrington?"

"I am Miss Barrington," responded the quadron, steadily and quietly meeting the clerk's gaze.

"Winifred Barrington?" muttered the clerk to himself: for the name, in connexion with the late trial, was fresh in his memory. "It is singular!—the same name—and the Christian name so peculiar! But still *this* can't be she who was tried!"—and thus musing, he again surveyed Miss Pincock.

"Do you know whether the case has arrived?" she asked. "Ah! perhaps you are struck by the similitude of names?—but it is only a coincidence. Heaven forbid that I should be that *other* Winifred Barrington of whom you are doubtless thinking!"

"Oh, no, Miss! I was certain you could not be!" ejaculated the clerk, because he had read at the time a description of Winifred's appearance, and it differed exceedingly from that of the quadron now before him. "But pardon me—my time is precious. There is a case which arrived just now, corresponding with the specifications in that letter of advice. It would have been sent on to your house this afternoon: but if you come, Miss, to take it away with you, you have only to sign the book and it is at your disposal."

"As the contents of the case are so precious, and I have already been very uneasy in consequence of the delay in its delivery, I will take it with me now. I have a cab outside," continued Emily, speaking in a steady tone; "and as I have received a private letter from Mr. Pinnock, who shipped the case at Kingston, I know precisely its size and description."

Emily then added a few little details, which convinced the clerk, if any additional reason had been wanting, that she was the identical Winifred Barrington who alone had a rightful claim upon the case. He therefore presented the receipt-book for her signature; and when with a firm hand she had signed the name of *Winifred Barrington*, the case was left at her disposal. It was speedily conveyed to the cab, upon the roof of which it was placed; and as the address on it was *Aldersgate Street*, the quadroon, careful of maintaining appearances, ordered the cab to proceed thither. Away went the cab: but it had not gone to any considerable distance, when Emily pulled the check-string, and the driver descended.

"I have to send that package somewhere abroad," said Emily; "and I may as well complete the business without having it first taken to my abode in Aldersgate Street and then having it removed to the shipping-agents'. Do you know of any shop where with the utmost despatch the case could be covered with tarpaulin or oil-cloth, so as to render it water-tight?—for it contains articles that may spoil. I shall pay you well for your trouble."

The cabman—anticipating a liberal fare, and therefore willing to oblige—at once drove to a shop with which he was acquainted, and where in the course of half-an-hour the case was completely enclosed in a strong black tarpaulin. The name and address upon the case were thus concealed. The quadroon now inquired for a large card, on which she wrote these words:—"Miss Pinnock, Mount Pleasant, Kingston, Jamaica. To the care of Messrs. Millard and Co., West India merchants, Lime Street, City."

These proceedings seemed sufficiently legitimate, straightforward, and natural in the eyes of the cabman—and all the more so when Emily bade him drive at once to the establishment of the Messrs. Millard. On arriving in Lime Street, Emily inquired for Mr. Millard, the head of the firm: and she was introduced into that gentleman's presence. On mentioning her name, she was cordially welcomed by Mr. Millard, who had that very morning received a letter from Mr. Pinnock in Jamaica, announcing the visit of his niece to England and opening for her a credit with the firm in Lime Street. As a matter of course Mr. Millard was anxious to offer the hospitalities of his house at Clapham to the niece of one of his most valued correspondents: but Emily on some pretext—which we need not now pause to describe—dispensed with the suggested arrangement. She consigned to Mr. Millard's care the tarpaulin-covered case which she had brought, and which was directed to herself, desiring that he would keep it until she gave further instructions in respect to its ultimate disposal. Taking leave of the merchant, Emily resumed her seat in the cab, and proceeded to Charing Cross, where she alighted.

Having liberally recompensed the cabman, she returned to her hotel on foot, exulting in the success of the plan which she had adopted in regard to the treasure.

On the following day Emily Pinnock was punctual to the appointment which she had made with Winifred through the message confided to the maid-servant at Mrs. Slater's house: but on arriving there, and being ushered up to Miss Barrington's apartment, the quadroon found herself in the presence of Gustavus.

"Ah! is it you?" she ejaculated, in a low half-suppressed tone, when she had turned to assure herself that the door was closed by the retiring maid-servant: for as we have already stated to the reader, Emily was by no means inclined to make a scene anywhere.

Though Gustavus was prepared for this meeting—though indeed he had courted it as the only alternative upon which in his desperation he could throw himself—yet now that he stood face to face with Emily, he felt as if he were about to suffer annihilation. He knew that she had been deeply, deeply wronged: he felt himself to be a criminal of perhaps even a greater magnitude than he really was. His pale countenance, his nervously working features, his quivering form, and his entire manner, betrayed the violence of the agitation which was taking place within him. As for the beautiful quadroon herself,—she had stepped short on throwing back her veil and uttering the ejaculation which we have above recorded; and her large luminous eyes were now fixed upon Gustavus with an expression which he could not possibly fathom.

"And thus, sir," she said, at length breaking silence, "you have deemed it expedient to meet me, instead of suffering me to encounter your cousin?"

"Emily," he replied, in a low hollow voice, "you see before you one who is so deeply, deeply wretched, that if you say but a syllable too harsh or utter a reproach too severe, some desperate deed will end the miseries which have already become well-nigh intolerable! Look how I am crushed! Your presence in England—the deed you have done in reference to the gold——"

"Gustavus," she interrupted him, "there need be no harsh language flowing from my lips: on the contrary, I am even yet prepared to forgive everything—and with me to forgive is to forget! But it is upon this condition—that with the least possible delay you do your duty towards me—you make me your wife!"

The youth groaned bitterly; and the name of "Winifred!" was in his anguish involuntarily ejaculated from his lips.

"Do you mean me to understand," exclaimed Emily, her eyes now flashing fiercely, the blood mantling upon her cheeks, her bosom swelling, and her whole form appearing to dilate with indignation,—“do you mean me to understand that when you dared to woo me, you loved another—and that this love has since asserted its empire to my immense prejudice? If it be so, Gustavus, then were you all along a vile deliberate sinner!—then did you systematically set to work to beguile me and to rob me of my honour!"

"No, not—by heaven no!" ejaculated the youth, almost frenzied at the idea that his conduct

could possibly admit of such a terrible interpretation. "I thought that I loved you, Emily!—God knows I thought it sincerely and firmly! But if the truth must be spoken, it was an infatuation—a delusion—a spell that was cast upon me by the magic of your beauty and by all the circumstances wherein I was placed!"

"And do you mean me to understand, sir," demanded the quadroon, her eyes flashing fires far fiercer than before, the blood crimsoning the very duskiness of her complexion, her full red lips wreathing with the haughtiest scorn, and her bosom swelling as if it would burst through the closely fitting bodice,—“do you mean me to understand, sir, that I was the toy of your passing amour—the victim of your delusion—the sport of the circumstances in which you were placed? Do not dare to tell me *this*, Gustavus!—for if you display a hardihood so infamous—an audacity so stupendous—it is a war to the very knife that will spring up between us, and nothing but your life's blood will appease my revenge!"

There was a fearful power in the language and in the looks of the indignant quadroon as she thus addressed the youth, who was overawed by consternation and dismay as he heard and as he stood all trembling before her.

"For God's sake speak not to me thus, Emily!" faltered Gustavus: "every syllable you utter is either a thunderbolt to shock or a dagger to pierce! I beseech you to listen to me—and then God knows you must become the arbitress of my destinies!"

"Speak, sir," said Emily, a flush of triumph for a moment flitting over her countenance.

"Two years ago," resumed Gustavus, "I left England—a mere boy, not understanding the nature of the feelings which I experienced for my cousin Winifred. Constantly did I think of her while in the vessel which for thousands of miles ploughed the Pacific seas: but never did I pause to analyze the sentiments with which I thus thought of Winifred. Then circumstances threw me as a guest at Mount Pleasant. It is no idle flattery to say to you, Emily, that no heart which is at all susceptible could remain altogether unmoved by the fascinations of your beauty. We were constantly together—my thoughts seemed to be in a continual confusion when I was with you—I was not the master of myself—you were an enchantress shedding upon me ineffable and irresistible spells! I walked about as if in a dream: I was led on step by step—having no moral courage to stop suddenly and say to myself, 'I must and will deliberate whether in the secret depths of my own heart I love Emily or I love Winifred!'—Do you comprehend what my position was? I myself understand it; and yet it seems to me that I cannot even now find words strong or expressive enough to explain my meaning."

"Proceed," said the quadroon coldly.

"You and I were to have been married," continued Gustavus; "and I endeavoured to persuade myself that mine was a happiness without alloy; but, ah! I was compelled to use efforts to thrust away from my heart the image of Winifred. Yet, as heaven is my judge! I should have married you, Emily—and you know that I should!—but all in a moment a thunderbolt fell at my feet!

You know to what I allude—the newspapers came——"

"Enough on this subject!" interrupted the quadroon: "it is mere useless recapitulation. Come to the point at once—tell me what you *now* think of Winifred, and what you purpose to do."

The youth actually reeled beneath the influence of the violent emotions which were agitating him; and for nearly a minute he gazed with a look of anguished entreaty upon the quadroon. Then suddenly sinking upon his knees, he said falteringly, "You ask me what I now think of Winifred, and what I intend to do? Oh, I love Winifred!—but you, Emily, are the arbitress of my destinies! It is you alone who can decide what I am to do!"

Again did a flush of triumph pass rapidly over the countenance of the quadroon: but Gustavus perceived it not, for his looks were bent downward as he knelt in a posture of humble entreaty and earnest deprecation before her. At length she said, "Rise, Gustavus—and answer me!"

He rose accordingly; and he now looked her in the face, saying, "Speak, Emily—speak! Put any question you will, and I swear to answer it truthfully."

"You love your cousin Winifred?" she continued, in a cold tone and with an unfathomable expression in her large luminous eyes.

"I love Winifred," responded Gustavus, not knowing whether he had everything to hope from Emily's generosity, or everything to dread from her vindictiveness.

"You love your cousin," she said; "and therefore you propose to espouse her?"

"Such was my intention," faltered the youth timidly.

"Then answer me, Gustavus," exclaimed the quadroon, her voice now swelling into a tone of solemn adjuration,—“answer me as if you were speaking to a power to whom the utterance of a falsehood would be tantamount to your soul's perdition? You love Winifred and you would espouse her. But tell me—have you seduced her? has she confided her honour to your keeping?"

It was almost with a cry of horror at the bare idea that Gustavus said, "No, no! God forbid! Impossible!"

"Ah!" ejaculated the quadroon, her cheeks crimsoning for a moment and the next instant becoming as pale as the duskiness of her complexion would permit: "then I will now ask you, Gustavus, who has the greater claim upon you?—she whom you swore that you loved, whom you vowed to espouse, and who is already your wife in the sight of heaven? or she to whom you have also spoken of love, whom you have also promised to espouse, but who is not as yet your bride in heaven's eye?"

The young man was for a moment overwhelmed by the unanswerable logic of the quadroon's inferences; and at length he feebly murmured, "Do as you will with me, Emily. For the third time I tell you that you are the arbitress of my destinies. Command, and I obey!"

"Then hear me, Gustavus," rejoined Emily. "You know my character well—or rather, perhaps, you did not know it when you fled from me; but now you know it when you find that I have voyaged across the ocean—daring the perils of the deep in winter's stormy season—to seek you in

your own native land—to claim you as my husband—to assert a prior right to the fealty of your heart—to grasp the hand which is mine only, and which can never be bestowed upon another! Yea—these were my objects in voyaging across the Atlantic; and for those purposes am I here! Think you, therefore, that I am now to be deterred by a tale of love-sick sentimentalism?—think you that I will resign all my own rights to the rival whom your boyish vacillation has set up? No, no, Gustavus! Perhaps you flattered yourself that I am what the world calls magnanimous—that I am generous—self-sacrificing—self-denying—capable of martyring myself for the sake of a fellow-creature—ready to immolate all my own feelings to save some other heart from a pang—content to sit down with the sense of mine own dishonour and unhappiness, that I may make the happiness of another? No, Gustavus!—I am not capable of such moral suicide! If what I should term utter cowardice and dastard self-abasement, be indeed virtues in your eyes,—then candidly do I confess that there are no such shining lights in the sanctuary of my soul!”

The quadroon spoke with an inconceivable eloquence—with a fluency which was in itself a power, apart from the actual sense of the language. Gustavus listened with a species of stupefaction: the numbing influence of despair was upon his soul—upon his heart—upon his brain—and in his very blood.

“From all that I have been saying,” continued the quadroon, “you may judge of what my decision is to be; for you have told me that I am the arbitress of your destinies. Listen then! Your gold is in my possession, and so carefully disposed of that never could you find a clue to it. For myself, I covet it not: but I know that you value it as the means of placing your relatives in a happy position. Make me your wife—and I swear by the great God above us that when we stand upon the deck of the vessel which is to bear us back to Jamaica, I will sign an order for the treasure to be given up to whomsoever you may appoint to receive it. But if on the other hand you refuse to do me the only act of justice which you can possibly perform, from that moment my vengeance commences. Winifred shall know everything—and we shall see whether your amiable cousin will wed a perjurer and a seducer! Your grandfather shall know everything!—as widely as possible will I publish your iniquity, although I shall be thereby publishing my own shame at the same time! As for your gold, it shall be buried deep in the bosom of the Thames. Now you know my decision, Gustavus. You cannot require a moment to make up your own mind: you have told me that I am the arbitress of your destinies—and I have spoken!”

“My God! my God! what can I say to Winifred? The meek the unhappy youth, literally wringing his hands in the agony of his mind, and giving involuntary utterance to those words in an audible tone.

“Always Winifred, Winifred!” ejaculated the quadroon scornfully; “but never a syllable of remorse on account of the Emily whom you have dishonoured and whom you would have betrayed so foully!”

“Believe me, Emily,” said Gustavus, with the

meek tone and submissive manner of one whose spirit was utterly crushed, “it is not that I hesitate or refuse to fulfil my duty towards you; for I admit the justice of everything you advanced when asserting your own prior rights and claims. But I think—I think”—and here his utterance was for a few instants choked by a deep convulsive sob—“it is that I think of poor Winifred, whose heart will be broken! For she loves me—she will be shocked at the black treachery of my conduct towards her—and God knows she has already suffered so much!”

“And is her heart the only one that can be broken?” demanded the quadroon in the implacable spirit of retort, and yet with the cold confidence of one who felt that she had an overwhelming argument against every reason, plea, or pretext which the youth could advance: “is Winifred the only one who can complain of black treachery? is she the only one who has endured so much? A truce to this weakness—this child’s play!—Where is Winifred now? and is it likely that she may enter at any moment?”

“She is at the prison, with our poor old relative,” answered Gustavus; “and I do not think it is probable she will return for the present—Ah! that footstep! Hush, Emily! Yea—by heaven, ’tis she!”

Time had slipped away so rapidly in the exciting interview between the quadroon and Gustavus, that neither suspected nearly two hours had elapsed since first they met, and that it was now close upon three o’clock. Yet it was so; and Winifred, wondering what could thus detain her cousin—uneasy on his account—a prey to many vague apprehensions—had come to seek him. Yea—it was Winifred whose light footsteps upon the stairs had just been heard by those inside the room!

“My God! my God!” moaned the youth in anguish: “what can I do? what can I say?”—and sinking upon a chair, he covered his face with his hands.

“Remember, you are *mine*!” were the words which breaking in upon the sounds of his own sobbing and convulsive weeping, fell upon his ears: and then Emily, having thus emphatically spoken, stepped back a few paces.

The next instant the door opened: Winifred made her appearance—and now for the first time the quadroon found herself in the presence of her rival.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WINIFRED AND EMILY.

WINIFRED beheld a scene which she had indeed little anticipated. Before her stood a tall, handsome, elegantly-dressed young lady, of dusky complexion, who was an utter stranger to her; and at the table sat Gustavus, his face buried in his hands, and the sounds of his sobbings plainly audible. There was something in the look of the quadroon which instantaneously affrighted and overawed the meek, bashful, timid Winifred,—a look which she could not however rightly comprehend, but which seemed to speak of mingled triumph and defiance.



For a few moments Winifred Barrington stood transfixed to the spot near the threshold of the door: but suddenly springing towards her cousin, he exclaimed, "Good heavens, Gustavus! what is the matter?—what means this wild and fearful grief?"

The youth started up to his feet; and Oh! what a ghastly woe-begone countenance it was which now revealed itself to Winifred's gaze! She stepped back in affright; and her look of anguished inquiry was thrown upon the quadroon, whom she naturally conceived to be more or less connected with her cousin's painful condition.

"Have no sympathy for me, Winifred!" cried Gustavus vehemently. "I am a villain—I have renounced you!—O, my God! what misery have I brought down upon myself and you!"

Gustavus spoke in a rending tone of anguish, as he wrung his hands in despair; and again flinging himself upon a seat, he covered his counte-

nance with those hands—for he could not endure to look his cousin Winifred in the face. As for Winifred herself, she was now almost completely overwhelmed with the announcement that had pealed from her cousin's lips: for what else could it mean than that the handsome dusky-complexioned lady had wrought all this change and had consequently a claim upon his affections? Then, all of a sudden, Winifred remembered that Gustavus in his first letter from Kingston had spoken of Mr. Pinnock's niece, "a quadroon girl:" and a light now flashed in unto her mind.

"For heaven's sake tell me what all this means?" said Winifred, appealing to the quadroon. "Perhaps you are Miss Pinnock——"

"I am Miss Pinnock," replied Emily: "and believe me, Miss Barrington, I am very sorry on your account!"

A deadly pallor overspread Winifred's countenance: she staggered, and for a moment seemed

as if she were about to fall: but suddenly exerting herself with all the energies that remained to her, she said in a voice of unnatural calmness, "I understand it now, Miss Pinnoek! You have perhaps a better claim upon Gustavus"—here her voice was for a moment choked—"than I have? If so, believe me I am not selfish—and it is with sincerity I exclaim, May God's blessings be upon you both!"

Such language from the lips of his injured cousin was far more terrible to the mind of Gustavus than if she had suddenly burst forth in vehement and passionate reproaches.

"Winifred," he said, throwing himself at her feet, "your words kill me! Their very kindness is a sharper dagger than if you spoke in wrath and indignation!"

"Rise, Gustavus," said Winifred, struggling hard to keep back an outburst of bitter weeping. "Whatever vows you may have plighted to this young lady, I entreat you to keep them!—for I now comprehend that you love her—I now see what you meant when you have so emphatically spoken of the sacrifices you made on my behalf!"

"Yes, rise, Gustavus," said the quadroon: "your cousin forgives you! Miss Barrington," continued Emily, who was now herself much affected—for she had anticipated a very different scene when Winifred made her appearance,— "your conduct is most admirable, and I shall ever think of you with friendship!"

Gustavus had in the meanwhile risen from his suppliant posture; and hastily turning away towards the window, he there stood, the picture of blank despair.

"Thanks—a thousand thanks for that kind assurance on your part, Miss Pinnoek," said Winifred, taking the quadroon's hand. "From the very bottom of my heart do I forgive my cousin; and therefore let not this circumstance trouble your happiness. I know that he loves you—I am confident of it!—it was a terrible sacrifice of feeling for him to desert you—but it was with the most generous purposes on my behalf! Tell him when he is calm, Miss Pinnoek," proceeded Winifred, now speaking in a very low voice, "that I entertain not the slightest rancour or ill-feeling towards him. On the contrary, I now know that the proposal he made to myself was inspired by a generous sense of what he deemed to be a duty. How therefore can I be angry with him?"

Though these words were spoken in so low a tone, yet they reached the ears of Gustavus; and hastening towards Winifred, he exclaimed enthusiastically, "You have the disposition of an angel! But all you can say or do does not the less make me feel like a villain—as indeed I know myself to be!"

"Enough, Gustavus!—enough!" said Winifred, whose countenance was now completely calm: "you must not thus accuse yourself in the presence of her who is doubtless soon to become your bride! I conjure you, Gustavus—for my sake as well as Miss Pinnoek's—compose your feelings! I am confident you have erred more through the pressure of circumstances than through downright wicked intention;—and we are all liable to such error!"

"But can you be happy, Winifred?" asked Gustavus, his voice still broken with sobs: "can

you recover that peace of mind which I fear I have so cruelly disturbed? Oh! let me give you at least one tittle of joyful intelligence! It is that the treasure is discovered—it shall be restored to you—and you shall yet enjoy the satisfaction of seeing our venerable grandsire come forth from prison!"

"Yes," said the quadroon; "the gold is safe, Miss Barrington. You can now perhaps full easily imagine how it came into my possession, and why I possessed myself of it."

"Enough, Miss Pinnoek!" said Winifred; "all these explanations are only too painful!"

"Come then, Gustavus," said the quadroon, "let us depart!—for the scene itself is most painful! Bid your cousin *farewell*!"—and Emily accentuated the last word in a significant manner as much as to imply that this farewell must be looked upon as eternal.

"Farewell, Gustavus," said Winifred, still with calm countenance and with tearless eyes; and perhaps there was even a slight soft smile upon her lips, as she extended her hand to her cousin in a way which was intended to imply that to the mere shaking of hands was this farewell to be limited, and that they must not embrace in the presence of her who was soon to be his bride: "farewell, Gustavus!—and may heaven bless you! Perhaps you will not see your grandfather before you depart—perhaps you will not *like* to see him," she added significantly; "and therefore you may leave it to me to say everything kind and affectionate on your behalf. You may leave it to me likewise," she proceeded, in a voice which now grew somewhat tremulous, "to tell a tale which shall properly account for your abrupt departure."

Gustavus had at first taken the hand which was extended to him; and he had comprehended the meaning with which it was so extended. He pressed it fervidly between both his own—he was again weeping and sobbing—he felt as if his heart must break; and unable to control his feelings, he caught Winifred in his arms.

"No, no! I cannot leave you thus!" he passionately exclaimed. "I will not leave you at all! I am free to act as I choose! Emily shall not coerce me! Let her keep the gold!—but I will be true to you, Winifred—and I will not desert my poor old grandfather!"

"Remember," said Emily's voice, speaking low yet impressively in his ear as he was straining Winifred to his breast, "you have sworn that I shall be the arbitress of your destinies!"

"Oh, yes!" cried Gustavus, suddenly unwinding his arms from about Winifred's form: "but a man may in a moment of desperation pledge his soul to Satan, and yet his guardian angel may step in to save him—and his virtue is greater in breaking the vow than even his crime would be in keeping it! I will not go with you, Emily!—I will remain faithful to Winifred!"

The young man was labouring under an almost frenzied excitement: his eyeballs glared, and his white teeth gleamed between his ashy quivering lips. He held both Winifred's hands tight in his own,—she vainly struggling to disengage them. The scene was now acquiring a terrible and fearful interest. The quadroon's eyes were flashing fierce fires—the colour was coming and going

rapidly beneath the duskiness of her complexion—she saw that all in a moment she had lost her vantage-ground, and that nothing but some desperate effort would enable her to recover it. At least so she fancied: for judging others by herself, she could not conceive that Winifred would now surrender up the lover who displayed so decided a preference for herself. But the quadroom had yet to learn the full extent of Winifred's self-sacrificing generosity; and thus assistance suddenly came to Emily Pinnock from the quarter whence she now so little expected to receive it.

All the time that Winifred was held in her cousin's frenzied embrace, she had struggled to disengage herself: but at that moment the quadroom's eyes were blinded with rage and jealousy, so that she perceived not these efforts on Winifred's part. But now Miss Barrington suddenly exclaimed "Unhand me, Gustavus—and hear me!"

She spoke in a voice of such unwonted firmness, and her words were accompanied by a kindred look of such resolute command, that Gustavus was suddenly overawed: and he released his cousin's hands.

"Now hear me!" said Winifred, retreating two or three paces: "hear me, I beseech you—and interrupt me not! My resolve, Gustavus, is irrevocably taken. Your's I can never be! I would not accept a heart that has even partially belonged to another! Besides, this young lady asserts claims upon you which she will not renounce; whereas I, on the other hand, renounce every claim which I might possibly assert. That you love her I know; and that she loves you, is evidenced by her coming across the seas to claim you. You know, Gustavus, that when you offered me your hand the evening before last, I first replied in the negative; and that negative was dictated by a previous determination on my part. The events of this day will therefore only carry me back to the position in which I was when I formed that determination; and if I can forgive you—as I sincerely do, Gustavus—for everything that has since taken place, there is no harm done. Now you have heard me. I beseech that there may be no more passion nor excitement: for everything is settled—and nothing," added Winifred, firmly, "can possibly alter my resolution. Farewell, Gustavus!—farewell, Miss Pinnock!"

Winifred just gave her hand to her cousin and quickly withdrew it: she gave her hand to Emily, but suffered it to linger for an additional moment in the pressure which the quadroom bestowed upon it. There was a vertigo in the young man's brain—he knew not what he was doing—he was not the master of himself—he stared around him in wild vacancy: and then, like one who had suddenly fallen into an idiotic tranquillity, he suffered Emily to lead him from the apartment. It was a look of ferid gratitude which the quadroom flung back upon Winifred ere the door closed behind her; and she hurried Gustavus down the stairs to the cab in which she had arrived, and which was waiting in front of the house.

But now that Winifred was alone, all the feelings she had pent up by the strongest efforts which ever human being made to conquer violent emotions—or rather, we should say, to assume a firm and tranquil exterior while the heart within was a

volcano,—all those pent up feelings now burst forth. Winifred sank upon her knees—buried her face in her hands, which rested against the edge of the table—and gave way to her grief. She was alone! Gustavus was gone!—gone with another who had come to claim him! Within one short hour all Winifred's hopes of happiness seemed to be utterly wrecked: for she loved her cousin—dearly, dearly loved him! And now she was alone; and he was gone! An eternal farewell had been spoken;—perhaps they should never meet again! In the generosity of her heart, when seeking to smooth down all difficulties in the late fearful scene, she had volunteered to tell the old man in prison some tale which should properly account for his grandson's sudden disappearance: but what tale could she devise for such a purpose? And had not the old man's assent been obtained to the union of his two grandchildren?—how therefore could this abrupt breaking off of the contemplated alliance be so explained as to save the honour of Gustavus in the estimation of his grandfather, and likewise prove that no fault lay with Winifred herself? Oh, it was indeed a difficult task which the poor girl had to perform!—it was altogether a hard lot which she had to bear!

No wonder, therefore, if she sank down upon her knees and wept bitterly!—no wonder if she thought that God himself had abandoned her when she found herself being smitten by calamity after calamity, blow upon blow! And no wonder either if the wound which had been made by the iron of recent misfortune penetrating into her soul, was now opened afresh!—and no wonder if her heart bled from its very core! Poor Winifred, thou wast indeed doomed to suffer—thou wast one of the world's martyrs—innocent, yet oppressed—virtuous, yet chastised as if saturated with all vices! Alas, poor Winifred!

She went not from her room during the remainder of that day; and throughout the night which followed, her form pressed not the couch. When the feeble light of a cold winter's morning gleamed in at the window, it found her seated upon a chair, her arms drooping downward—the hands clasped—her whole attitude that of deep, unutterable despair. But now she rose, and she suddenly said to herself, "I have been wrong thus to yield to affliction!—wrong to imagine that I am abandoned by heaven! Does not the Book of Life itself give the assurance that those whom the Supreme Being loves he chastens?"

Winifred knelt down and prayed. She prayed long—not with agony nor with grief, but with earnestness and with fervour: she besought God to give her strength to pass through all her trials. She rose, comforted. She performed her ablutions, and she felt refreshed. But she would partake of no food; and issuing forth from the house, she walked far away—she walked rapidly, wowing the fresh air to her pale cheeks, and hoping that by the invigoration of the body she would likewise be able to invigorate the mind. At length she began to retrace her steps; and at about noon she returned to her lodgings. She was met in the passage by Mrs. Slater, who exclaimed, "The case is come, my dear Winifred! I ordered it to be taken up to your own room. I locked the door—and here is the key."

The worthy woman, in the joy she experienced at the arrival of the package (though she had known nothing of its temporary loss), was so great as to prevent her from discerning anything changed or peculiar in Miss Barrington's look or manner.

"Did no letter nor message accompany it?" inquired Winifred, in a voice which began faltering, but into which she almost immediately infused a steady firmness.

"No—nothing," replied Mrs. Slater. "A man brought it in a cart—I think he said he came from a Mr. Millard. I signed some book as receiving it in your name—I gave the man a trifle for his trouble—and he went away."

Winifred expressed her thanks, took the key of her room, and hastened up-stairs. There she found the case, enveloped in the tarpaulin which Emily Pincock had caused to be fastened about it: and a simple card on the outside bore Winifred's address. She cut away the tarpaulin with the idea that there might possibly be some note inside: but there was none. She did not open the case—she had no curiosity to see the gold—but she murmured to herself, "Heaven has not altogether abandoned me; for if my own happiness be gone, I have still the means of insuring that of my grandsire!"

She now proceeded to the prison; and she told her grandfather a tale of how Mr. Pincock in Jamaica had hurriedly sent over to fetch Gustavus back to him—how Gustavus had been compelled to depart—and how this departure took place too late on the preceding evening for the youth to call at the prison to bid his grandsire farewell. In a word, Winifred so managed matters with the old man as to satisfy his mind completely: for as a little stroke of policy, the considerate girl had brought him some delicacies for his table and some new articles of raiment, to which his entire attention was accordingly at once directed.

On leaving the prison, Winifred repaired to Mr. Wardour's chambers; and to this gentleman she reported that the case of gold had arrived. He promised to take immediate measures for the disposal of the ore and dust, so that the amount might be realized in the current coin of the British realm.

"There was with me just now," he observed, "a gentleman whom you well know, Winifred, and who experiences the liveliest interest in everything that concerns you: I need scarcely add that I allude to Mr. Dalham; and I presume that I was guilty of no breach of confidence when I informed him of the manner in which heaven was at length smiling upon you?"

It was only by a great effort that Winifred could keep back her tears, or prevent the deep silent sigh from expanding into an audible sob, as she thought how greatly Mr. Wardour was mistaken; for though the gold remained, yet he whom she loved more than all the treasures in the world had been taken from her! She happened to be seated with her back towards the window—the December day was gloomy—and thus Mr. Wardour did not observe whatsoever emotion was expressed upon her features.

"No, sir—there was not any breach of confidence," said Winifred, "in acquainting Mr.

Dalham with the fact that riches had flowed into my possession——"

"And he is rejoiced," continued Mr. Wardour. "to learn that your grandfather's affairs are to be taken out of Mr. Timperley's hands and entrusted to other solicitors. As a matter of filial duty Roderick Dalham could not assume a positively hostile demeanour towards his father by openly espousing Mr. Barrington's cause in the lawsuit: but still, as you well know, Winifred, Roderick Dalham's sympathies are entirely with that cause—for he knows it to be the just one, and he deeply feels that his father has been a vindictive persecutor rather than an honourable litigant. Indeed," continued Mr. Wardour, "Roderick Dalham trembles with the suspicion that there must have been some secret understanding of a treacherous character between his father and Mr. Timperley; though I was careful to say nothing relative to that warning note which Mr. Barrington received the other day—for I was delicate in dealing with Roderick Dalham's feelings, and I abstained from saying aught that might strengthen the suspicion to which I have just alluded."

"And do you really think, sir," inquired Winifred, "that there has been any such treacherous understanding——"

"If Mr. Timperley has really been playing a false game towards your grandfather," interrupted Mr. Wardour, "it must have been through some peculiar motive. As a lawyer one would think that he valued his professional reputation, and would be anxious to gain this suit; while, in the second place, as a man notoriously greedy for money, he ought to desire to bring the matter to a conclusion that he might obtain his costs in case of success, or get rid of an expensive speculation in case of failure. When therefore we see Mr. Timperley acting in altogether a different sense—and when we find that a private warning in respect to his character has been sent—we can arrive at no other conclusion than that he has all along been acting a treacherous part from very strong motives. But who could make it worth his while thus to act unless it be Sir John Dalham himself?"

"True!" said Winifred: "and deeply must it distress Mr. Roderick Dalham's mind to entertain a dishonouring suspicion, however vague and slight, in reference to his own father!"

"I have not been speaking," continued Mr. Wardour, "so strongly against Mr. Timperley without certain grounds, which grow more and more suspicious the farther they are investigated. I think it will be shortly discovered that your unfortunate grandfather has been detained in prison by a network of the deepest villany—a network the meshes of which were originally woven by Mr. Waldron, but which have been since multiplied and strengthened by the hands of Mr. Timperley. However, in a few days I shall be enabled to tell you more."

Winifred took her departure from Mr. Wardour's chambers, pondering on all he had said to her. We should observe that although some mention had been made to the worthy barrister of a certain warning letter connected with Mr. Timperley, yet the name of Mr. Hargrave was

not proclaimed, and the secret of that warning letter's source was duly respected.

Winifred had entered Aldersgate Street, and was in the neighbourhood of her lodgings, when she encountered one of whom for the past hour she had been painfully thinking. This was Mr. Dalham. They stopped: he shook Winifred by the hand; and perceiving that she was pale and careworn, his countenance assumed an air of the deepest concern, as he said, "I was in hopes, Winifred, from all Mr. Wardour had very recently communicated to me, that the days of unhappiness had passed and that the period of bliss and prosperity had arrived?"

Winifred gave no immediate response: but the tears flowed down her cheeks.

"Tell me, my young friend," said Roderick Dalham earnestly, "why are you thus unhappy? why are you distressed? Have you not riches at your command?—is not your cousin returned?—and am I not to judge from this fact that he has pleaded his suit so effectually that your scruples have been overcome and that you have consented to bestow your hand upon him?"

"Mr. Dalham," replied Winifred, in a low deep voice, "I ought to have no secrets from you. Everything is at an end between my cousin and myself!"

"Oh, Winifred! if you have done this," exclaimed Roderick Dalham, "you were wrong—believe me you were wrong! You have perhaps destroyed his happiness as well as your own——"

"No, sir—do not blame me," interrupted Winifred: "it was not my fault! I must not seem capricious, hard-hearted, obstinate, or selfish in your eyes! Learn then the truth. My cousin loved another—it was but as a matter of duty, kindness, and sympathy that he offered his hand to me——But that other—a young lady of transcending beauty—a quadroon whom he knew in Jamaica——She came over to England—she arrived two or three days back——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Dalham; "a beautiful quadroon! And her name?"

"Emily Pincock," replied Winifred.

"Then by heaven 'tis the same!" ejaculated Dalham. "And your cousin Gustavus—is he a tall, slender, dark-haired youth——"

"Yes," said Winifred. "But what do you know of Emily Pincock?"

"I know where she is staying," responded Dalham: "it is at an hotel at the West End. It happened that at the very moment she alighted at the door, I was passing—I protected her against an impudent robbery that was being attempted—and to confess the truth, I subsequently had the curiosity when again passing the door of that hotel, to inquire her name from a waiter who was lounging there."

"And is she not eminently beautiful?" asked Winifred, with difficulty suppressing a sigh. "But you say that you have seen my cousin also——"

"Yes—and scarcely an hour back," rejoined Mr. Dalham. "It was in St. Paul's Churchyard—I caught a glimpse of that beautiful quadroon's countenance in a cab which stopped——Ah! now I comprehend it!—it was at Doctors' Commons! I was struck by that handsome young man who assisted Miss Pincock to alight—and they disappeared together under the archway."

Winifred understood what this announcement signified; and though she had renounced her cousin that he might conduct Emily Pincock to the altar—though she had made up her mind that this marriage would take place—though she had exerted all her energies to resign herself to the irrevocable loss of him whom she loved—yet now did she feel as if stricken by a sudden blow when she learnt that Gustavus and Emily had been seen entering Doctors' Commons: for what other object could they have than to procure the marriage license?

"Winifred," said Mr. Dalham, again taking her hand and pressing it fervidly, "I fear that I have told you something which has much distressed you?"

"And yet I feel that to be now distressed for all this," faltered the poor girl, "is something very wrong. Oh! I will be calm—I will summon all my courage to my aid!"

"Lean on my arm, Winifred—and let us walk slowly along the street," said Mr. Dalham; "or we shall be observed by the curious eyes of the passers-by. Restrain your emotions, I implore you! It grieves me infinitely to think that you are thus doomed to experience affliction after affliction! Oh, why will you not suffer me to take your happiness into my keeping?—why will you not bestow upon me this hand which I covet? You look upon me as the saviour of your life: will you not make me the guardian of your happiness also? You will some day be rich, Winifred—whereas I myself may be comparatively poor——"

"You, Mr. Dalham?" she ejaculated in astonishment.

"Yes," he replied: "for let me now speak to you seriously upon certain matters. Your grandfather is destined to gain his suit shortly—I am convinced that he will succeed—and the result will be far more fatal to my father than ever I fancied until yesterday. But yesterday I obtained an insight into my father's affairs; and I discovered that if by the law's decree he should be compelled to surrender up the estates which he has so long enjoyed, ruin will stare him in the face—yes, absolute ruin, Winifred! And that ruin," added Dalham, energetically, "will as a natural consequence redound upon me!"

Winifred shuddered throughout her entire being: for, as she leant upon Dalham's arm, he could feel that the strong convulsion thus passed through her. She reflected profoundly and in silence for several minutes. The strongest appeal had been made to her by one to whom she laboured under incalculable obligations; and as the reader is aware, she possessed a heart capable of any self-sacrifice.

"To see you involved in ruin, Mr. Dalham," she at length said, in a low but earnest tone, "would be the cruellest affliction that could possibly smite me. Oh! you have saved my life—and that life would I lay down for your sake! My God! tell me, what would you have me do?"

"I would have you do nothing, Winifred, against your own inclinations," replied Roderick Dalham: "but I will put a case to you, and leave it for you to reflect upon. Suppose that you gave me your hand——"

"That hand which but a few days back I would

have given to another?" ejaculated Winifred. "No! no!—you would not accept it!"

"I would accept it, Winifred, as the most inestimable of treasures," rejoined Dalham; "and though your heart has been given to another, yet I should not despair of winning it for myself—I mean in the course of time: for I should surround you with all kindnesses—your happiness should be my constant study—"

"Proceed, Mr. Dalham," said Winifred, in a tremulous voice,—“proceed with the case which you were about to put.”

"Let us suppose that you gave me your hand," continued Roderick Dalham: "neither my father nor your grandfather need learn the secret. The suit must now speedily be decided. If it result in my father's favour, you will in due time become enriched through me, your husband: if it result in your grandfather's favour, I shall continue rich through you, as my wife. For rest assured that in this latter case the old man will leave you the bulk if not the whole of his fortune; because your cousin will have espoused a West India heiress, and will become rich from that source."

"Give me a day or an hour," said Winifred, "to reflect upon everything you have told me—"

"Take a day or a week, Winifred," interrupted Dalham; "for heaven knows that I would not have you do anything rashly!"

"To-morrow at this same time," said the young maiden, in a low but firm voice, "my decision shall be made known. Meet me here."

She gave him her hand for a moment, and then hastened onward to her lodgings, which she reached without once looking behind her. Shortly after her return home, Mr. Wardour arrived, accompanied by a bullion-merchant, who was provided with the requisite tests to ascertain the quality of the gold as well as scales to weigh it. The bargain was completed; and that same day the sum of fourteen thousand five hundred pounds was invested by Mr. Wardour, in the name of Winifred Barrington, in the Bank of England.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NAPLES.

THE scene now shifts to the city of Naples. There, at about the time of which we are writing—namely, in the second week of December, a little more than a month after Winifred's trial and acquittal—Charles De Vere arrived to assume his post as one of the paid attachés to the British Embassy at the Neapolitan Court. He had come out with the Ambassador himself, who had been for some few weeks in England; and Mrs. De Vere was to follow him in a short time. This lady had been suffering more than usual of late; and at the time when Charles was called upon to leave England his mother was too enfeebled to accompany him. She however strove to hide the extent to which she suffered; and she pleaded as an excuse for remaining behind the necessity of making arrangements for disposing of her furniture and letting Belmont Cottage, of which she had taken

a lease. Thus it was agreed that Mrs. De Vere should follow her son to Naples so soon as these arrangements were carried into effect.

Charles had been well educated: he spoke the French language fluently—he had a very decent knowledge of the Italian tongue; and ever since his appointment to the post of attaché, he had been studying it diligently. He could thus converse with tolerable ease in Italian, while he could perfectly comprehend it when it was spoken.

We are not about to enter into a long and tedious description of the component parts of the British Embassy at Naples—nor of the diplomacies in which young De Vere was now to bear a certain part—nor of his appearance at the Neapolitan Court—nor of the unsettled state of the Kingdom of Naples itself at the close of that memorable year of revolutionary movements—1818. Neither are we about to inflict upon our readers an elaborate description of the city of Naples, which looks beautiful even in the midst of winter, with its magnificent bay in front and the heights of Vesuvius behind: nor is it our purpose to usurp the functions of the tourist by depicting the appearance, the manners, habits, or customs of the Neapolitan people. We have an important episode to enter upon; and we shall commence the recital with the least possible delay.

It was one evening in the second week of December—a few days after the arrival of Charles De Vere at Naples—that he wandered forth alone into the streets to view their aspect at that hour, and likewise to make some little purchases which he required. The weather had been remarkably mild throughout the day; and though the breeze from the sea had freshened towards sunset, yet it was far from cold, and there was no bitterness in the atmosphere. Our young hero's purchases were soon made; and as it was now only eight o'clock, he continued to roam through the streets, occasionally admiring the fronts of the brilliantly lighted cafés, but for the most part occupied with his own thoughts. He reflected upon the farewell scene with the beautiful Agnes, whom he loved so devotedly: he remembered how she had besought him to tell her candidly whether the disgrace which had overtaken her cousin Floribel, and which was pretty generally known, had effected any change in his sentiments towards herself?—and he silently repented the fervid words which he had ejaculated at the time, when straining Agnes to his breast in a farewell embrace, he had cried, "No, my beloved! how is it possible that I could think the worse of you on account of your poor erring cousin!"

Charles De Vere likewise thought of the brilliant prospects that were now open before him, his footsteps having entered upon a diplomatic career in which the natural fervour of his youthful imagination depicted his future course as leading on to the highest honours and dignities. And he thought to himself how happy should he be when the day should come on which he would by his position be justified in conducting Agnes to the altar. He thought also of that memorable trial in which he had been compelled by circumstances to appear as a witness: he was glad that a favourable verdict had been pronounced in respect to Winifred—but he was bewildered when he asked

himself how she could in reality be innocent in the presence of all the strong circumstantial testimony which had been arrayed against her.

While thus yielding to his various reflections, Charles de Vere became unmindful of the course which he was pursuing; and he presently found that he was in a quarter of the city which was completely strange to him. This however gave him no concern; for he could easily inquire his way, or he might take a vehicle to bear him back to the British Embassy, where he dwelt. He had got beyond the sphere of the brilliantly lighted streets: he had unconsciously wandered into a lower and more obscure neighbourhood, and where there were but comparatively few persons passing in the thoroughfares. As the evening was fine, and Charles had no inclination to return to his abode in a hurry, he did not take a public vehicle: but he inquired his way to the mansion of the British Embassy. The first person he thus addressed, happened to be a Frenchman, who was excessively polite; but as he had only that day arrived in Naples, he was utterly unable to afford the information he required. Scarcely had the Frenchman passed on his way when Charles de Vere beheld another gentleman approaching him: but as the particular street where the incident occurred was dark in consequence of the shutters of most of the houses being closed, our hero could not obtain more than the most transient glimpse of the individual's countenance during the few moments that he addressed him.

"Would you have the kindness," inquired Charles in Italian, "to direct me towards —"

"Excuse me sir—but I have no time to devote to any one:" and the individual passed rapidly by.

His voice was that of a young man: his tone and manner were sufficiently courteous, although the words which he had spoken were in themselves anything but polite. Young De Vere could not help gazing after him. He was a person of middle stature, apparently well dressed, though he was enveloped in an ample cloak which concealed his under-garments; but the cloak itself was such as only a gentleman might be expected to wear; while it struck our hero that on the ungloved hand by which the stranger retained the cloak across his chest, a brilliant gem glistened. That he was an Italian there could be little doubt from the accent with which he had spoken. He was speedily lost to the view in the gloom of the street; and Charles de Vere began to look out for some other person to whom he might address himself.

He had not proceeded many yards ere he stopped at the portico of a small house, where a lamp was burning; and he halted for the purpose of consulting his watch by means of that light. He found that it was now exactly nine o'clock; and he was wondering how long it would take him to return to the English Embassy, when the door beneath the portico opened, and an elderly female hastily stepped forth, followed by a younger one. The rays of the lamp fell for but a single instant upon the countenance of the latter female; for she immediately drew back—and the only impression concerning her which remained on the mind of Charles de Vere, was that it was a youthful face of which he had thus caught a glimpse. The

elderly female, on the contrary, lingered for a few moments, while she rapidly demanded, "Are you Count Juliano?"

"No, no!—it is not he!" said the young female, in a tone which might have either been petulant or affrighted; and at the same instant she stretched forth her hand to draw the elderly female back.

At that very same moment Charles de Vere heard the faint, feeble cry of a young child,—that cry being almost instantaneously stifled as if by a sudden pressure against the bosom of the younger female, whom he believed to be the bearer of the babe: for it assuredly was not in the arms of the elder. The door was then closed with some little degree of violence, as if to intimate to the youth that he was an intruder in that portico.

He began to walk away slowly, for some undefined sentiment of curiosity prompted him to linger on the spot. It appeared to him as if he had already become partially involved in some adventure of a mysterious or romantic character. He turned back a pace or two, and looked at the house. It was of respectable appearance, and moderate dimensions—such an one as might be inhabited by a family in easy circumstances belonging to the middle class. The glimpse which he had obtained of the younger female was too transient, brief, and indistinct to enable him to form a conjecture in respect to her apparel, beyond this one fact, that he recollected she had an ample black veil thrown upon her head, but which was not completely drawn over her countenance. His memory served him better in respect to the elderly female—or rather, we should say, he had been allowed more time to observe her, and he recollected that her face was thin, swarthy, and wrinkled; while in reference to her apparel, it was that of a respectable citizen's wife—indeed precisely what might have been worn by the mistress of the house where the little incident occurred.

It now struck Charles de Vere that the farther he proceeded along that street the greater would be the distance which he was placing between himself and the British Embassy. He therefore began to retrace his way; and in so doing he again passed by the portico of the house to which we have been alluding. At that very moment the door again opened—the elderly female peeped forth; and Charles—afraid that if he were seen loitering there, some sinister design might be imputed to him—crossed rapidly over to the opposite side of the street, and was hurrying away. But the elderly female sped after him, caught him by the arm, and abruptly demanded in the Italian tongue, "Have you any particular business here?"

"I would not have you think that I was loitering near these premises," at once replied our young hero, "for any improper motive, nor through any sentiment of impertinent curiosity."

"Then what is your motive?" inquired the female, fixing upon Charles a pair of keen black eyes which seemed fully capable of penetrating the gloom of the evening and piercing deep down into the depths of his soul.

"When you found me standing for a moment

beneath your portico," he rejoined, "my object was merely to consult my watch."

"You are not an Italian?" interjected the woman hastily.

"No—I am an Englishman: I belong to the British Embassy—I have lost my way—and I was looking about for some one of whom to inquire it."

"Oh, is that all? Then follow me," said the female quickly; and she added in a more courteous tone, "I shall have much pleasure in guiding you to the nearest spot where you may obtain a vehicle to take you to the Embassy."

But scarcely had she thus spoken, when from the surrounding gloom a figure rapidly emerged; and by his cloak Charles at once recognised the individual who had refused him the requisite information some few minutes back. But the collar of his cloak stood so high up, and his broad-brimmed hat so far shaded the upper part of his countenance, that the youth failed even more than on the former occasion to obtain a good view of that face.

"What means all this delay?—and who is the stranger?" inquired the cloaked individual, hastily drawing the elderly female aside.

The woman whispered a few rapid words in his ear: but what they were our hero could not catch. The next instant the cloaked individual was hurrying away again; and he was soon lost in the surrounding gloom.

"Now, sir, follow me," said the elderly female: and Charles De Vere at once obeyed her—for he thought that to linger or to hesitate would be to display an impertinent curiosity in respect to the little incidents, which, however mysterious they seemed, might after all have no real importance.

The woman led him along at a rapid rate, and without speaking another word, until two or three streets were threaded,—when she stopped short in the immediate neighbourhood of a stand of public vehicles.

"There, sir," she said: "you can find the means of conveyance to your destination. Good night."

Charles thanked her—and at once summoning a vehicle, took a seat in it, desiring the driver to bear him to the British Embassy. As the hackney-chaise drove off, Charles from the window caught a glimpse of the elderly female still standing at the corner of the street, as if to watch and assure herself that he really took his departure.

"There is something strange in all this!" said our hero to himself, "something which the persons engaged therein do not wish a stranger to obtain an insight into! It struck me that the cloaked individual was quite young and good-looking; the same might be said of the younger female whom I beheld beneath the portico—and yet if I were to meet them both again to-morrow, I should not recognise them by their countenances."

Meanwhile the vehicle was driving onward through several obscure streets, when all of a sudden there was a crash, followed by a concussion which made our young hero bound upon the seat. He was then thrown so violently forward that his hat was crushed against the front part of the vehicle. The fore axletree had broken; and it was fortunate that Charles escaped with nothing more than the severe shaking and a slight abra-

sion of the skin on the forehead (as he subsequently discovered), caused by the dashing in of his hat.

He was compelled to alight; and having paid the unfortunate driver his fare, he inquired the nearest way to the Embassy. The man directed him: and Charles, thinking that he thoroughly understood how many turnings he was first of all to take to the right and then how many to the left, resolved to continue his way on foot. But he soon found himself at fault, for he was thinking of those little incidents which he had regarded as more or less mysterious, and which had to a certain extent piqued his curiosity—so that by giving the rein to his reflections he thoroughly lost his way. On being compelled to make this admission to himself, he looked about him: he was still in a poor and obscure neighbourhood, where the shops were shut up, where the thoroughfares were but dimly lighted, and where the street-lamps were but few and far between. He was just on the point of accosting some one at a little distance to inquire his way, when a female came rushing towards him; and an ejaculation of surprise burst from her lips. She was enveloped in an ample cloak, and she wore a black veil completely over her countenance. The immediate impression of Charles De Vere was that this must be the younger female whom he had seen beneath the portico; and the idea was strengthened into conviction when the plaintive wail of an infant, issuing from beneath her cloak, reached his ear.

"You are not what you seem!" she said, in a quick excited tone—but her voice was singularly musical: "or at least you were just now in the portico for some purpose which I cannot fathom! For heaven's sake tell me!"

"Most solemnly I declare that I was beneath that portico for the mere purpose of consulting my watch, and with no other design. But you seem to be in distress of mind? Perhaps you need the succour of a friend—and if so, tell me how I can serve you?"

There was something in the tone and manner of Charles De Vere which evidently convinced the veiled stranger that he spoke with a chivalrous sincerity while proffering his services: but perhaps the emergency was so great that it was requisite to trust somewhat to chances.

"Do you really and truly belong to the British Embassy?" inquired the young female, in a tone of intense anxiety.

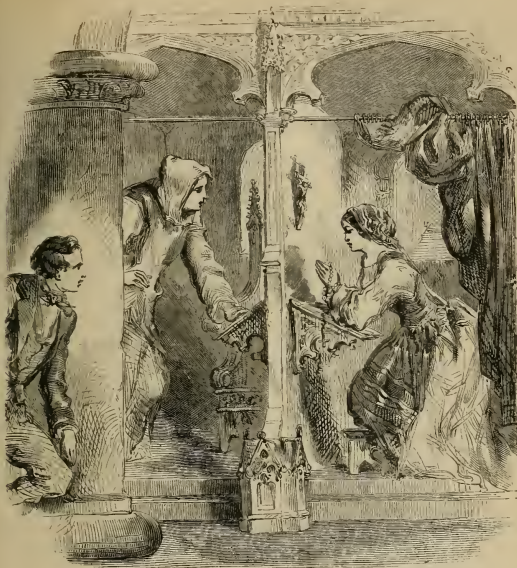
"I do—on my honour I have asserted the truth!" rejoined Charles, instantaneously comprehending that his veiled querist must have received the intelligence from her elderly companion at the portico.

"And your name?" she demanded, with rapid utterance as before.

"Charles De Vere," was the response. "What can I do for you?"

"As you have a soul to be saved," exclaimed the young female, "I conjure you to save the life of this poor babe! Place the innocent somewhere—make no inquiries—attempt not to fathom this mystery until I communicate with you, which shall be in a few days. For the love of God refuse me not this favour. It is a matter of life and death!"

Assheton spoke in a voice of mingled entreaty



and anguish, the young female produced the babe from beneath her cloak—deposited the little burden in the arms of Charles De Vere—and murmuring in a fervid tone, “Heaven will bless you for this!” she glided rapidly away.

The whole incident took place in far less time than we have occupied in the description. Our young hero had been so carried on by his excited feelings of mingled curiosity, astonishment, and sympathy, that he was like one bewildered and stupefied when the young female’s singular request was propounded. He had therefore mechanically received the child in his arms; and the next moment he was standing alone with it there. He had not even caught on this occasion a glimpse of the young female’s countenance; so that he feared he should not be able to recognise her again. The whole affair might be very romantic—but it was assuredly still more awkward. For there stood Charles De Vere, with an infant child in his arms,

in the middle of the streets of Naples, between nine and ten o’clock at night,—he having to provide an asylum for the babe, and yet being an almost total stranger in the Neapolitan capital, utterly ignorant to whom he should address himself to take care of the infant! He quickly began to repent of the chivalrous impulse which had led him to receive the babe in his arms, until he recollected the solemn assurance that by his conduct he was saving its life; so that his better feelings soon became predominant over his regret for having suffered himself to be drawn into the affair.

But what was he to do? The question was bewildering itself. Fortunately the infant was now sleeping serenely in his arms; so that there were no wailing cries to add to his embarrassment, or consummate what might be deemed the ridiculous portion of his predicament. He walked onward, without having the slightest notion of

what plan he intended to adopt. He was in such a strait that it was impossible he could readily make up his mind to any particular course: he was compelled as it were to trust to the chapter of accidents. On he went,—until he by accident found himself close by the spot where the adventure had occurred to the hackney-vehicle. Some half dozen people were collected on that spot, rendering assistance; and as Charles De Vere contemplated them for a moment from a short distance, he overheard the driver of the broken vehicle say in a tone of vexation, "It is a bad evening's work for me! It was the only fare I had obtained all day; and though the gentleman paid me liberally, it will not a quarter make up the cost of the accident, for which I myself shall have to pay."

An idea struck our young hero. Hastening forward, he bade the man step aside with him for a few moments; and when the Neapolitan recognised the gentleman who had paid him so liberally, he at once obeyed. But he looked with astonishment at the burden which Charles bore in his arms,—though he said nothing until our hero himself renewed the conversation. This he did so soon as they were at a suitable distance from the persons collected about the broken vehicle.

"So you will have to pay for this accident?" said Charles, thus abruptly initiating the discourse.

"The worse luck for me," answered the Neapolitan. "I hire the equipage by the day, of an extensive jobbing-master; and I have to pay for all accidents."

"Are you a married man?" demanded Charles.

"Yes—and there again's the worse luck! For poor Benedetta—that's my wife—will have scarcely bread to-morrow to give the children, of which we have five."

"And what is your name?" inquired our young hero, putting his questions with rapidity.

"Nino Corso," rejoined the man; "and though I say it, signor, it is an honest name, because an honest person bears it."

"Will you and your wife take charge of this child?" demanded De Vere: "you shall be liberally paid in advance,—I will tell you who I am—I will give you a proof that I am what I represent myself—but you must ask no questions—and you must be secret."

"It is a bargain, signor!" exclaimed Nino Corso eagerly,—“provided that you fulfil all your share of the compact!”

"Lead me to your house—and you shall see."

"Ah! my house indeed!" ejaculated the Neapolitan, with a laugh half merry, half bitter: "it is one room in an attic! But it happens to be close by; and such as it is, signor, you will be welcome."

This discourse had taken place in the immediate neighbourhood of a lamp, the beams of which had shown Charles De Vere that Nino Corso was a man of about eight-and-thirty or forty—with an embrowned complexion, rather good-looking features, and a frank, open, honest expression of countenance. On the other hand the Neapolitan himself had every reason to be satisfied with his survey of the youth's appearance: so that their opinion on these points was mutually good. Charles had likewise bent a look upon the babe;

but he was not sufficiently skilled in infantile matters to be enabled to tell its age—though he fancied that it could be scarcely six weeks old. It was decently apparelled, and was enveloped in a large shawl.

Nino Corso quickly led the way to the house in which he dwelt, and which fortunately happened to be barely a hundred yards distant. He led the way up a dark staircase to the highest storey of the building; and he conducted the young Englishman into a room of poverty-stricken appearance, where five young children lay huddled together in a sorry bed made upon the floor, and where a good-looking though somewhat careworn woman, of about two-and-thirty, was preparing a meagre supper against her husband's return. Not immediately perceiving that he was accompanied by any one, Benedetta gave her husband a kind word and a caress; so that Charles De Vere said to himself, "These are really good people!—and providence has befriended me on this poor innocent babe's behalf!"

Nino Corso requested De Vere to enter; and in a few words he explained to his wife the proposal which had been made. Benedetta at once consented; and she took the child in her arms.

Fortunately De Vere's purse was well supplied with coin at the moment; for he had filled it on issuing from the Embassy, on account of the purchases which he had to make, but which had not cost him half as much as he had anticipated. He spread upon the table as much Neapolitan coin as would make the sum of about ten pounds in English money; and both Nino and Benedetta gave vent to ejaculations of joy, for in their eyes the amount was a perfect fortune. Charles then gave his card, which described him as an attaché to the British Embassy; but this proceeding was quite needless, the gold being considered an adequate guarantee of his respectability and good faith. He enjoined the man and his wife to maintain the strictest silence and secrecy; and having promised to call upon them again shortly, he took his departure,—Nino showing him the way to the nearest stand of public vehicles. The young Englishman bade him good night, and returned to the embassy, marvelling in no small degree at the adventure which had befallen him.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FATE PENITENT.

It was in the forenoon of the day following the incidents which we have just detailed, that Charles De Vere again rambled forth by himself partially with the intention of seeking Nino Corso's lodgings and inquiring after the infant of whom he had as it were become the guardian, and partially that he might be altogether alone to reflect upon everything which had so recently occurred to him. The other gentlemen attached to the Embassy had invited our young hero to accompany them on an expedition to Vesuvius; but he preferred to be alone—and he had therefore on some pretext declined their pressing entreaties. He was in a complete state of suspense: his curiosity was ex-

sited to the utmost: he longed to fathom the mystery of this adventure in which he was plunged. He had read Italian novels, romances, and newspapers: he knew that in Italy there were frequent tales of real life more extraordinary than any which belonged to the sphere of fiction; and it seemed as if it had been destined that he should not be many days on the Italian soil before his actual experiences were to corroborate the romantic imaginings which he had entertained previous to breathing the atmosphere of this clime. He knew likewise that in these romances of real life love was no mean motive power, and that the darker passions of jealousy and vengeance agitated beneath the surface of society, as the pent-up lava of Vesuvius boiled within its mountain-bosom;—and though we cannot say that Charles De Vere actually entertained any apprehension in respect to the adventure wherein he had become engaged, yet in his almost utter ignorance of its details he perceived the necessity of acting a cautious part and being upon his guard.

The reader may perhaps wonder that he did not at once seek out the obscure quarter of the city in which that house was situated where he had seen the elderly female and the younger one, and there prosecute certain inquiries so as to ascertain who were the occupants of that habitation. But our young hero possessed a loftiness of soul and a magnanimity of disposition which perhaps would have been more worthy of a bygone age of chivalry than of the practical matter-of-fact period of the present day. He therefore considered himself in honour bound to obey not only to the letter, but even in the very spirit, the injunctions which the young lady had given him. "*Make no inquiries; attempt not to fathom this mystery until I communicate with you, which shall be in a few days.*" Thus had she spoken; and her earnest entreaty had been instantaneously followed up by the solemn adjuration—"For the love of God refuse me not this favour!" Thus, though Charles De Vere had in reality made no pledge on his own account, he considered that he was placed by circumstances precisely in the same light as if from his lips had gone forth the most sacred of oaths to fulfil that young lady's demand. And if he sought the neighbourhood where he believed that she dwelt—if he were seen lurking about there—would she not instantaneously suppose that regardless of her entreaty, he was abandoning himself only to the impulse of his curiosity? This would be mean, ungenerous, unhandsome on his part; and he said to himself, "No!—as I have thus far become entangled in an adventure so strange and mysterious, I will suffer it to take its own natural course in developing its secrets to my knowledge!"

But let it be well understood that though this was the resolve to which Charles De Vere had previously brought his mind, and in which he was now only strengthening his determination by such sayings as these, he was not the less a prey to the most exciting curiosity. He felt restless and unsettled; and thus, having avoided the society of his companions of the Embassy, he was now wandering forth without any fixed purpose in view, unless it were to be alone with his reflections. He was proceeding along one of the principal streets, when he passed a church from the open portals of

which came rolling forth the rich tones of a magnificent organ. Charles De Vere was passionately fond of music; and he had always loved the sacred harmony which swells beneath the vaulted roofs of temples of worship. He entered the church; and with hat in hand, as well as with noiseless footsteps, he advanced towards the congregation assembled in front of the altar at which the priests were officiating. It being a week-day, this congregation was chiefly composed of the middle and lower orders; and for the most part—as may be seen in nearly all Catholic countries—the worshippers were females. It was a very handsome church: there were several altars and chapels separated by superb screens of sculptured masonry. In order not to seem singular amidst the devout assemblage, nor to offend any native religious prejudice by having the air of a loungeur drawn thither by mere curiosity, Charles took one of the chairs which were vacant, and knelt in it,—thus following the example of the rest.

As he was furtively gazing upon those who were immediately in front of him, his eyes settled upon a female figure kneeling in a chair three or four rows nearer to the altar. A dark velvet bodice, fitting tightly to the form, displayed a most admirable symmetry; while the mantilla-like veil, which had fallen back, disclosed a beautifully shaped head. The skirt of the lady's dress was of a pale silk; but even while she knelt, it defined as it were the sweeping length of the lower limbs. Her sleeves, which descended but little below the elbow, revealed portions of the exquisitely modelled arms; and dark auburn tresses lay like burnished gold upon the snowy neck. She was evidently young, though Charles could not see her face; and he felt convinced that this face must be beautiful.

Now, perhaps our readers will imagine that all these were traitorous symptoms on the part of Charles De Vere—a traitorous towards the beautiful Agnes Evelyn to whom his heart and his vows were alike pledged. But no pernicious idea entered the brain of our young hero; and indeed so faithful was he to our beautiful heroine, that he would have fled from any adventure of gallantry even if it had presented itself, so that he was by no means likely to seek one of his own accord. But still it may be permitted to the most faithful lover to regard with a certain degree of interest the appearance of an attractive female, without any ulterior thought; and so it was in the present instance. Charles was moreover struck by her exceeding devotion: for though her back was towards him, yet could he perceive by a variety of indications that she was thus devout. Presently she stooped to pick up her kerchief: then he caught a glimpse of her side-face—he beheld the profile for a single moment, with that half-vanishing effect which Rembrandt loves to impart to his pictures; and as it happened that a streak of light was slanting through a window fully upon this young lady's countenance, the big tear-drops trickling down her cheek, glistered perceptibly. And young she was—and beautiful too, as Charles had already surmised; and he wondered why she should be thus moved to weeping. For since his entry into the church the music had been grand rather than affecting; and it therefore seemed to him as if this young lady were weeping as a penitent, and under the influence as it were

of her own inward thoughts rather than of external circumstances.

Almost immediately afterwards the service concluded—the congregation rose and began to disperse in different directions. Charles now lost sight of the weeping fair one: indeed he was not any longer seeking her with his eyes—for his feeling of interest had not carried him to that point at which he might really be deemed traitorous to his love for the far-distant Agnes Evelyn. There were several beautiful monuments, chapels, and paintings in the church; and our hero tarried to survey them. In the course of a few minutes the auburn-haired stranger was completely absent from his memory: his thoughts had partially relapsed into the channel which received its impulse from the incidents of the preceding evening; and his attention was partially drawn to the objects of interest which he was contemplating. This was the first time he had been in an Italian church; and he found much to admire. At length he began to think that as all the congregation had withdrawn, he stood a chance of being locked inside the building; so that he began to bend his hasty steps towards the entrance. But now he heard the sounds of weeping and lamentation; and a female voice was giving vent to self-reproaches, as he could tell by the accents, though he could not catch the words which she uttered. Full of the most mournful harmony was that voice; and its tones, so replete with affliction and grief, went to the very heart of our generous young hero. He could not precisely tell from which direction came these notes of woe, as he had halted at the moment between two pillars which concealed the mourner, whoever she were, from his view, and the echoes of the vast vaulted edifice were deceptive. With the intuitive dread of intruding upon a grief which, whatever its cause, must in such a place be deemed sacred, Charles De Vere, treading lightly—indeed with almost noiseless footsteps—was continuing his way towards the main entrance, when on passing round one of the pillars, he came suddenly in sight of a female form kneeling in front of an altar in one of the small chapels. And that form was the one which had already to some little extent attracted his attention during the performance of the service.

He could not help stopping short and gazing upon the beauteous penitent as she there knelt. She did not perceive him: she was completely absorbed in her mingled devotions and lamentations. Her lips merely murmured a few broken expressions; and still without catching their complete sense, Charles nevertheless gathered sufficient to make him aware that she was imploring heaven's mercy and forgiveness. Now she buried her face in her kerchief and wept passionately: then she folded her arms across her bosom and prayed in deep silence. Since Charles first noticed her in the midst of the congregation, she had placed an elegant lace cap upon her head: but the mantilla or veil-like scarf lay by her side on the stone steps of the altar. Every now and then he caught another glimpse of her profile: but not once did he behold her full face during the three or four minutes that he remained riveted to the spot thus gazing upon her. Then, suddenly recollecting that he was doing the very thing which he had first of all studied to avoid—namely, intruding upon the

sanctity of her penitential devotions—he glided behind the pillar and made his exit from the church, without having been noticed by the afflicted stranger.

Yet why had he lingered even those few minutes? Because his soul was filled with an illimitable compassion for one who though so young was evidently acquainted with much grief,—and this grief he feared was not altogether unassociated with faults and errors on her own part. She could not be more than nineteen or twenty, so far as he was enabled to judge without having obtained a view of her full face. She was well though not richly dressed; but she was in the morning costume which every lady, whatever her rank, might wear; and there was a certain grace and elegance about her which would have made her look the lady, no matter what her apparel might have been. Had that young heart become acquainted with guilt?—did that youthful bosom harbour a conscience suffering the pangs of remorse? There was something terrible as well as mournfully interesting in the spectacle, and this is why Charles De Vere lingered:—for he would have lingered just the same even if Agnes had been leaning upon his arm at the time!

He went forth from the church, his mind full of all that he had seen; and he continued his way through the streets without heeding the direction which he was taking, or indeed without having any settled purpose in view. Thus he wandered on for some time, until at length he stopped short and looked about him. The name of the street where he had thus halted was printed on a small board at the corner; and he found it to be the one in which Nino Corso dwelt: for the hackney-coach driver had mentioned his address before Charles De Vere took leave of him on the preceding evening.

"Since I am in this quarter," said our young hero to himself, "I will visit Nino Corso, and see how his good wife Benedetta gets on with the poor little infant whom circumstances have for the nonce thrown as it were under my guardianship. Besides, it almost seems as if heaven itself had directed my steps hither, while I was coming through the streets utterly careless of the way which I was taking."

We have already said that Nino Corso and his family inhabited a lodging on the highest story of the house where they dwelt, and which was let out to a variety of other tenants. There was a large gateway which always stood open in the day-time; and no door protected the entrance to the staircase, which was a little way under the arch of that gateway. De Vere began to ascend the stairs; and he had nearly reached the highest landing—indeed he was just in sight of it—when the door of the room which he sought was suddenly opened, and Benedetta peeped forth with a countenance which at once struck our hero as being full of anxiety—though all in a moment it cleared up when she recognised him. Yet, without giving utterance to a word, she instantaneously withdrew into the room. Charles then caught some hasty ejaculation escaping her lips—but what it was he knew not; and then the next moment a very tall man, completely muffled in a large travelling-cloak, rushed forth from that room, made one stride across the landing and disappeared by an opposite door, which evidently communicated with another room.

Our hero thought that this incident was somewhat singular; but he continued his way, and in a few moments reached the top of the staircase. Benedetta now again issued forth, and invited him to enter. Her countenance was composed—unless it were that there was a slight glittering of unbusiness in her dark eyes as she saw that Charles was evidently marvelling what could be the meaning of the little incident which had just happened. He entered the room, wondering for a moment whether he should find her husband there: but Nino Corso was not present. It struck him that Benedetta was not altogether the true wife which Nino doubtless believed her to be, and that she was somewhat too intimate with her neighbour on the same floor. But when he beheld all her children in the room—when he looked again upon her countenance and saw that if it were not completely composed, it expressed only a mild depreciation of any injurious suspicion on his part—he thought to himself, “I must not judge too quickly by appearances; for in every other respect she has thoroughly the air of a correct and virtuous woman.”

He remembered the kiss with which she had welcomed her husband's return on the preceding evening—a glance showed him that her children though poorly clad, were all scrupulously neat and clean—and the babe whom he had confided to her, was sleeping in a new cradle, which had been evidently bought that morning out of the liberal funds which he had left behind him. Everything, therefore, seemed to forbid the thought that Benedetta could be a bad woman;—and yet that incident of the cloaked individual rushing so hastily from her room and disappearing in the opposite one, troubled our young hero's mind. That it was not the cloaked stranger of the preceding night, he was confident; for the individual whom he had just seen flit across the landing was much taller than the other to whom we have just alluded.

“Welcome, signor,” said Benedetta, in a tone which struck Charles as being slightly tremulous; “though I did not expect you so soon—for you gave Nino and me to understand that you would return in a few days.”

“I am indeed afraid,” replied Charles De Vere, looking her steadily in the face, “that I am an intruder at this particular moment.”

“No, signor,” answered Benedetta: and for an instant her lip quivered, though with her large black eyes she unflinchingly met our young hero's look. “My little charge,” she continued, somewhat more quietly, as if to turn the conversation—and she glanced towards the cradle—“has taken to me wondrously. He's a healthy boy.”

“Of what age do you suppose?” inquired Charles.

“What, signor! do you not know?” exclaimed Benedetta in astonishment. “Surely—”

“The child is not mine,” interrupted our hero, speaking gravely, and with a slight flush upon the countenance: but yet there was all the frankness of an unquestionable sincerity in his tone and look. “But I desired most emphatically that no questions should be asked me.”

“True, signor!” said Benedetta, respectfully and humbly. “I was very wrong to judge by appearances: for *appearances*,” she added signific-

cantly, “never ought to be estimated at a first glance.”

“Let that be an understanding between us,” rejoined Charles, with an equal degree of significance; so that Benedetta's countenance brightened up—for his words were as much as to imply that if she would not judge him suspiciously in respect to the child, he would be equally careful in arriving at a rapid conclusion with regard to the incident of the cloaked stranger.

“The infant, signor,” she proceeded to say, now speaking more cheerfully and with more good humoured frankness than at first, “is about six weeks old.”

“Six weeks,” muttered Charles, half audibly: “that was the idea which struck me last night. And now tell me, Benedetta,” he continued, “have you discovered any initials upon the clothing of the infant—any name—any trace—”

“Nothing of all that, signor,” answered the woman; and still she could not help gazing on him with astonishment—though the expression of her curiosity was confined to her looks, and did not again allow itself vent in questioning.

Charles had not put those queries with any idea of obtaining a clue to the mystery into which he considered himself bound not to seek by any undue means to penetrate: he merely wished to discover whether the woman herself had got upon the track of any such clue. Her answer was thus far satisfactory; and Charles, now rising from the seat which he had taken, bent over the child as it slept in its cradle. It was a beautiful babe; and our young hero felt a mournful interest in the little innocent who was already, so to speak, the victim of some calamity, though itself utterly unconscious thereof.

“Where is your husband?” inquired Charles, resuming his seat. “But I presume that he is busy in superintending the repairs required by his vehicle?”

“He stepped out, signor, about ten minutes ago to see how they were getting on,” answered Benedetta; “and I expect that he will return every moment.”

The answer was given quite naturally; and yet Charles De Vere could not help thinking that it sought to convey a more pointed meaning than that which belonged to a simple response to a casually put question. It appeared as if Benedetta had intended to give him to understand that her husband's absence was on this occasion so brief and so temporary it would be ridiculous to suppose that there was any evil intention in her reception of the individual whom Charles had seen gliding across the landing,—or rather whose muffled form he had seen, for not the slightest glimpse had he obtained of that person's countenance.

According as Benedetta had intimated, Nino Corso returned in a few minutes; and he expressed his delight at seeing our young hero. After some little conversation, Charles rose to take his leave: and Nino descended with him into the street.

“I beg your pardon, signor,” said the man: “but if the infant is to remain altogether out at nurse, I hope you will leave it entirely with Benedetta: for though she has children of her own, she will be like a mother to it—and your liberality

I do not hesitate to confess is of the greatest service to poor creatures like us."

"My good fellow," replied Charles, "I have already told your wife that the child is not mine—and I may add that I know indeed but very little about it. I am not the arbiter of its destinies. But you must ask me no questions; for in respect even to the little I do know, I can give no explanations."

Having thus spoken, somewhat curtly, though kindly enough, Charles De Vere hurried away.

Nothing else worthy of mention occurred to our hero during the remainder of that day. In the forenoon of the ensuing one he had to attend at the French Embassy, to transact some little business according to the instructions of his own diplomatic chief, the English Ambassador. This occupied him for about an hour; and he was sauntering through the street on his way homeward, when he happened to pass the church where he had seen the fair penitent on the preceding day. He glanced up the ascent of steps towards its portals; and just at that instant he caught a glimpse of the symmetrical figure, with the velvet bodice, the pale silk skirt, and the lace mantilla veil. The next moment the red baize-covered door opening into the church, closed behind that form; and Charles was about to pass on, when a feeling which he could not resist, made him linger—then stop short—and then enter the church. But let it not be supposed that this feeling was either one of impertinent curiosity, or yet of a character whereat Agnes might be offended: it was the emanation of a generous heart experiencing the interest of sympathy and commiseration for the woes of a fellow-creature who was so young to be so deeply afflicted.

The service was near upon its conclusion; and the young lady, instead of mingling with the congregation, or approaching the altar at which the priests were officiating, diverged towards the chapel in which Charles had seen her penitentially kneeling on the preceding day. He was half inclined to speak to her—to ask whether it were possible that he could render her a service?—but a second thought made him aware of the impropriety of such a step, and he therefore lung back. Still he lingered in the shade of one of the pillars; and there he stood contemplating the form of the lady, who was by this time kneeling in front of the little altar. For a few minutes she seemed to be praying devoutly and profoundly, with her kerchief concealing her face: but presently she withdrew that kerchief—she rose from her kneeling posture—she turned round—and our young hero had only just time to disappear completely behind the column in order to avoid being seen by her; for he would not have it thought that he was watching her proceedings. But now for the first time he had caught a full view of her face; and though the glimpse was so transient, yet did it make an immediate and powerful impression upon him.

"It must be the same!" he said to himself: "yes, it must be the same! I cannot be mistaken!"

But still he was scarcely so sure as his self-musings might seem to indicate: for on the night of memorable adventures he had caught so very fleeting and transitory a glimpse of the younger

female's countenance inside the portico of the house, that if he were now put into the witness-box of a court of justice he could not on his oath affirm that the face he had then seen was identical with the one he had just beheld. Nevertheless, on the other hand, he was morally certain that it was so. Be it recollected that when the infant child was placed in his arms, the young female was so closely veiled he could discern naught of her features; and she likewise had worn a mantle. But Charles remembered the stature; and it was precisely the same as that of the young lady in the velvet bodice. In imagination he clothed the latter with such a mantle as was worn by her from whose hands he had received the child; and he felt assured that the personal appearance would be identical. And then too, this young lady in the velvet bodice was afflicted, was suffering deep mental distress, and was pursued by some remorse. Was not this circumstance another reason to confirm our hero's suspicion that this lady was identical with the one whom he had hitherto thought of only as the heroine of the mysterious adventures of the other night?

Charles De Vere naturally experienced a degree of curiosity that was most poignantly excited by the reflections which thus swept through his brain. Two adventures which until now had appeared separate and distinct, were linking themselves together; and circumstances seemed to be gradually falling into a channel which should lead onward to a development of all mysteries. But still the youth would not now accost the young lady; for if she beheld him there, would she not at once surmise that he was purposely espying her proceedings? and would she believe that accident had alone flung him in her way on the present occasion? On the other hand, he could not make up his mind to quit the church immediately, and voluntarily abandon the very track on which accident or providence had set him in respect to the elucidation of those mysteries with which he was more or less intimately concerned.

While he was thus standing irresolute and undecided behind the pillar, his ear suddenly caught the sounds of a man's footsteps on the pavement: then there was a halt, immediately followed by the abrupt yet low-uttered ejaculation, "Ah, Ginevra! you here?"

"Yes, Silvio—I am here," replied that soft mournful musical voice which Charles immediately recognised to be that of the young lady whose lamentations he had heard on the preceding day at the altar of the little chapel.

And now the conviction smote his mind with the rapidity of a flash of lightning that it was precisely the same voice as that in which the young cloaked female had spoken when she had placed the child in his arms. He wondered that he had not before recognised it—though this really was not extraordinary, for the rapid and excited tone in which she had spoken when entrusting the infant to his charge, was different from the accents of anguish in which her lamentations, her repinings, and her self-accusings had been made at the altar. Both voices were musical—but the tones and notes of the melody were different on the two occasions. Now, however, all doubt was cleared up; and the identity of the young cloaked female who had accosted him in

the street, with the young lady at the church, was fully and completely established. Charles De Vere was riveted to the spot behind the stately column: the thought never struck him that he might be guilty of impropriety in playing the part of eaves-dropper, or that he was now actually violating the pledge he had inwardly taken not to seek to fathom the mystery until it should suit the purposes of the lady herself to clear it up.

"Yes, Silvio—I am here," was the answer which she had given to the ejaculation of the individual by whom she was accosted. "Is not this the most fitting place," she asked, in a voice of profoundest sorrow, "for one so guilty and so wretched as I, to frequent?"

"Ginevra, dearest Ginevra!" responded Silvio, whose voice was that of quite a young man—and Charles felt convinced it was the same which he had likewise heard on the night of memorable adventures; so that he was now enabled to identify Silvio with the cloaked individual who had answered him so abruptly when he had inquired his way, and who had afterwards come up at the moment when he was speaking to the elderly female. "Why do you abandon yourself to all this grief? You surely love me no longer——"

"Heaven knows that I ought not to love you, Silvio!" she replied; "for this love of our's has been fatal to my happiness—and what is infinitely worse, fatal to the welfare of my immortal soul! But you, Silvio—what are you doing here? Why are you still in Naples? Methought that after the message I sent you by my aunt, you would have done me this last favour—you would have fled at once and returned to Vienna——"

"What, Ginevra! and leave everything in a state of frightful uncertainty?" exclaimed Silvio: but though his accents were exclamatory from the impulse of his emotions, his utterance was guardedly low. "Tell me—I beseech you, tell me, Ginevra! what have you done with the child?"

"Do not ask me, Silvio!" she vehemently responded: "you shall never know! No, no! I will not place that dear innocent within your reach! Heaven and yourself, Silvio, alone can tell—unless indeed my aunt was the accomplice of your design——"

"Ginevra, do you suspect me?"

"Alas! I fear that I have only too much reason to suspect something dreadful! Why was it that an idea of the kind seemed suddenly to flash in unto my mind, as if heaven itself thus abruptly placed me on my guard, that I might save the poor innocent babe?"

"Ginevra!" interrupted the young man, "be-ware what course you are pursuing! You have become headstrong and self-willed—and you may possibly ruin everything! You are placing me on the brink of a frightful precipice; you have already walked up to the very edge of it yourself! You will not be counselled nor advised——"

"If you mean, Silvio," answered Ginevra, in accents of mingled sorrow and reproach, "that I suddenly became mistrustful of the designs of my aunt and yourself in reference to the poor babe, you are right! I will sooner dare everything—discovery, dishonour, and disgrace——"

"And you are daring all these!" interjected Silvio vehemently;—"not merely daring them in

your own person, but actually invoking them as it were upon my head! All this is terrible, Ginevra!—and it is enough to drive me mad! You ask me why I am still in Naples!—and I tell you that I cannot depart hence so long as by your own conduct you are perilling everything. You know that I could not seek you at your own mansion; but remembering that you were in the habit of frequenting this church, I came hither in the hope of meeting you. And we have met! I might have written—but letters were useless in my ignorance of what your present thoughts and intentions might be—useless also in my ignorance of what you have done with our child! When the night before last you so suddenly broke away from your aunt and myself——"

"Were you not whispering to my aunt, Silvio?" inquired Ginevra; "and what, under existing circumstances, could you have had to say to her that I might not overhear? Oh, a terrible suspicion flashed to my mind!"

"Ginevra, did you—did you really think"—and Silvio gasped,—"did you really think that I was capable——"

"Heaven knows if I wrong you!" responded Ginevra; "and your conscience can acquit you if I have done you this much injury. But all the anxiety of a mother—though a guilty and a miserable one—was suddenly excited in my bosom; and I acted under that impulse! Now listen to me, Silvio! The babe is safe—I know that it is—and so soon as my mind shall have somewhat recovered from all the fearful shocks it has recently experienced, I will take measures to place it in other keeping where the secret shall be inviolably maintained. On this head, therefore, you have nothing to fear. You must deem me mad if you suppose that I am not as deeply interested as yourself in throwing the darkest veil possible over everything."

"Ah! now you are speaking rationally, dearest Ginevra!" said the young man in a tone which implied great mental relief. "Oh, my beloved!"

"Silence, Silvio! silence!" interrupted Ginevra firmly. "We stand beneath a sacred roof and in the neighbourhood of a holy face. Words expressive of a guilty love must not here issue from our lips—no, nor elsewhere, Silvio!—never, never again! But if you wish that my mind should speedily recover somewhat of its lost strength, so that I may be enabled to take the final measures which are requisite for the insurance of the safety of our secret, you will at once solemnly pledge yourself to depart from Naples—to return in all haste to Vienna——"

"Oh! suffer me, Ginevra," interjected Silvio, in accents of earnest entreaty, "to know where our babe now is, and to learn what intentions you entertain concerning that innocent for the future? Am I not its father? have I not a right——"

"Silvio," rejoined Ginevra, "all the right to dispose of that babe rests with me, its guilty and unhappy mother! Ah, if you knew how terrific is the weight which lies upon my soul, you would pity me—my God! you would pity me! I feel as if the gates of heaven were for ever closed against me——"

"Oh, it is this—it is this, Ginevra!" exclaimed Silvio passionately, "which I fear more than anything!"

"What do you mean, Silvio?" demanded Ginevra, in accents of mingled surprise and reproachfulness.

"I mean," he answered with rapid and excited utterance, "this yielding on your part to religious terrors—this abandonment of your soul to superstitious influence—In a word, Ginevra, tell me—reply to me, I entreat and conjure you! has our tremendous secret been yet revealed in the confessional?"

"No—not yet, Silvio," she replied, in a voice of calm firmness.

"Not yet! Then you mean me to understand that it is your intention——"

"It is my intention, Silvio," rejoined Ginevra, in the same calm firm tone as before, "to fulfil the ordinances of my creed—to endeavour to make my peace with heaven by means of confession—to accomplish any penance which priestly lips may enjoin—and to obtain absolution, if possible, for the great sin which I have committed!"

"Ah! now can you wonder, Ginevra, that I am haunted by the wildest fears—that I already see exposure and disgrace—infamy and perhaps punishment, staring us in the face——"

"The secrets of the confessional," interrupted Ginevra, "are never revealed, Silvio, by the holy men to whom they are confided!"

"Oh! but the bare idea that another person should be acquainted with our secret, Ginevra," exclaimed the young man,—"that there should be any one, whether priest or layman no matter—whom neither you nor I shall ever dare look in the face——"

"You forget that already the secret rests not solely betwixt you and me! My uncle and aunt——"

"Oh! but they are different, Ginevra!—and you will not deem it offensive if I say that they are selfish and interested people, who for a thousand reasons will keep the secret religiously——"

"And so will the holy priest," rejoined the young lady, "to whom it is my intention this day to confide it."

"Frankly speaking," said Silvio, now with a tincture of irony in his tone, "I am so little acquainted with these matters, that I would fain acquire information. Tell me, then—when in the confessional, do you mention names?"

"It is by no means needful," answered Ginevra; "and in ordinary cases names are suppressed. But in the present instance the mere circumstances when fully detailed, will serve, alas! as an only too unmistakable indication of the particular family whose honour is involved—yes, and of the particular individuals through whose deep iniquity that honour has thus become compromised!"

"And you are resolved, Ginevra, to run this fearful risk?" said Silvio, in a voice of mingled reproach and anger.

"I am resolved to seek absolution for my sins," replied the young lady, with calm steadiness of tone. "This absolution is only to be acquired by penitence—and penance can only be enjoined through the medium of the confessional. Now, Silvio, you comprehend my resolve, which is irrevocably taken. If you have yet the inclination to be of service to the wretched but deeply contrite partner of your guilt, you would confer two favours upon me,"

"Name them, Ginevra," said the young man.

"The first is that you at once repair to the vestuary, where you will now find the holy priests assembled—that you will ask for Father Felconera—and that you will tell him a penitent awaits him in the confessional near the Chapel of the Magdalen. Having done this, you will within the hour that is passing quit Naples and set out on your return to Vienna."

No immediate answer was given to these entreaties: but after a pause of nearly a minute, Charles De Vere heard the voice of Silvio saying, almost abruptly, "Yes, I will fulfil your behests, Ginevra—I will do these two things which you have enjoined me. And now farewell!"

"Farewell, Silvio," replied the young lady: "and if we consult—I can scarcely say our earthly happiness, for that I fear is wrecked for ever—but if we consult the welfare of our immortal souls, we shall never meet again. Depart, Silvio. Farewell!"

A moment afterwards Charles De Vere heard the guilty pair separate; and though they proceeded in different directions, the pillar behind which he was placed continued to conceal him from the view of both.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CONFESSIONAL.

THE feelings with which our hero had listened to the preceding colloquy, were those of an intense, all-absorbing, and almost awful interest. He had remained riveted to the spot, without once reflecting whether he were guilty of impropriety in lingering a listener there. He had obtained a deeper insight than he had before possessed or imagined, into some history of guilt—but what its precise extent might be, he was still ignorant. That it was not a mere ordinary case of seduction on Silvio's part, or of maiden's weakness on that of Ginevra, he had heard enough to convince him; and therefore he could not help, thinking that Ginevra must be the wife of another—that she had proved faithless to her marriage vows—and hence the darker stain with which her conscience dyed her crime. That she belonged to the higher order of society, was tolerably apparent from the allusion which Silvio had made to the mansion at which she dwelt: though on the other hand this seemed rather inconsistent with the fact that her uncle and her aunt should reside at a comparatively humble house in a mean and poor quarter of the city. Yet these little details were trivial as topics of reflection, in contrast with the more terrible and important subjects which accident had brought within the scope of our hero's meditation.

For a few minutes longer he remained behind the pillar, awaiting a favourable opportunity to escape from the church unperceived by either Ginevra or Silvio. The service had terminated in the midst of the colloquy which was progressing between those two—the congregation, which happened to be very small on the occasion, had issued forth—and no straggler had chanced to pass through the aisle where the preceding scene took



GINEVRA

place. Charles De Vere lingered in order to afford sufficient time for Ginevra to seek the confessional, and for Silvio to deliver her message at the vestuary. He was now about to take his departure, when just as he was on the point of emerging from the shade of the pillar, he beheld the form of an individual, wrapped in the cowl of a Dominican priest, and wearing the scapulary of that order, pacing towards the confessional. But at that very instant a current of air somewhat disturbed the dark hood which was drawn over the individual's head; and Charles caught a glimpse of the countenance that was thus for a moment revealed. All his recollections of the

night before the last flamed up vividly in his mind; and he was smitten with the impression that the face he had just seen was the same which he had only imperfectly obtained a glimpse of on that night. Was it possible, therefore, that Silvio himself was now by some means personating the priest—that he was usurping the functions of the Father Falconara whose holy ministration the guilty Ginevra had specially demanded?

Charles had drawn quickly back in such a way that the individual—whether Silvio, or Falconara, or any one else—could not possibly have noticed him; and again behind the pillar did our hero reflect profoundly. If a hideous imposture were

being practised against Ginevra, ought he not to interfere and prevent it? But on the other hand, was it not possible that he might be mistaken in his supposition that he had really recognised the countenance of the cloaked individual who had figured in the incidents of the night before last, and whom he now knew to bear the Christian name of Silvio? This consideration held him back. He was bewildered how to act. On the one hand, if he did nothing in the case, he might become an accomplice, so to speak, in a foul and sacrilegious imposture: but on the other hand, if he were to interfere, he might discover that he was labouring under a mistake—that it was the veritable Father Falconara after all—and that by his intervention he would be only proving that he had played the eavesdropper in respect to the discourse which had ere now taken place between Ginevra and Silvio. If Charles were a Catholic, he would doubtless have run any risk to prevent the possible desecration of the confessional: but inasmuch as he was a Protestant, he thought that he had better remain entirely on the safe side so far as he himself was concerned, and leave matters to take their own course.

Having arrived at this conclusion, Charles De Vere issued from the church, without passing in view of the confessional where the penitent Ginevra was kneeling on one side, and where the individual in the Dominican garb was seated on the other. As he walked slowly through the streets, our young hero continued to ponder all he had heard. The character of Ginevra would have filled him with surprise, were he not already rendered by his reading tolerably well acquainted with the disposition of Italian women. He knew that when once religious influences had maintained a strong hold upon them, they could not be shaken off; and though they were seldom potent enough to save feminine virtue from the headlong current of guilty passion, they nevertheless brought back the sinner to the feet of the priest, to obtain absolution for the past, leaving the future open either for a reformed career or else for a relapse into error. Thus superstition blended itself singularly and even fantastically with the depravities and profligacies of many of the Italian women; and they often alternated between the influences of the lover and the priest. Indeed it is well known that to be a devotee and an inveterate *intrigante* is common enough with Neapolitan women; and thus Charles De Vere was scarcely astonished at the seemingly contradictory phases which Ginevra's character displayed. That her penitence was however sincere—that her remorse was great—and that she fully appreciated the depth of her iniquity, whatever its extent might be, Charles felt convinced: and not for a moment did he conceive that she was one of those who made a convenient use of the confessional to obtain periodical absolution for her sins with the intention of plunging anew into the vortex of profligacy. He even thought within himself that she must naturally be endowed with good traits and virtuous principles, but that a fatal passion had proved the stronger, and that her reason, her sense of propriety, and her deep religious feeling had been all insufficient to bear her up against the power of temptation. Thus, however dark her crime might be, she was still a being to merit compassion and sympathy, and to remain

within the pale of the most merciful and charitable considerations.

Possessed as he now was of the Christian names of the guilty pair, and knowing likewise that Ginevra resided at some mansion, Charles might immediately have set on foot such inquiries as would have still farther elucidated the mystery, and brought to his knowledge the name of the family whose honour, according to Ginevra's own words, was so seriously compromised. But Charles was still most honourably delicate on the point: he considered himself to be under an obligation to Ginevra to avoid stepping out of his way to ascertain any facts beyond those which accident itself might bring within the range of his knowledge; and though our readers may probably fancy that he was over nice and scrupulous on the point, yet such was his disposition, and he followed its magnanimous dictates.

As he was proceeding along the street, absorbed in his meditations, he heard his name suddenly ejaculated in a female tone and in the English language.

"Ah! there is Charles De Vere!"

Those were the words that were spoken; and at the same instant our hero beheld a gentleman and lady hastily retreating inside a jeweller's shop,—the lady evidently pulling her male companion thither, as if she of the two were most interested in escaping his notice. Charles stopped short: he had at once recognised the voice—but as the lady sought to avoid the interview, he was delicate in enforcing a meeting. He accordingly passed on, but slowly and loiteringly—ever and anon looking back to see whether the couple who had thus avoided him might think better of their conduct and hasten after him. They did not however reappear; and Charles continued his way towards the Embassy. On arriving there, he found that a Queen's messenger had just come from England with despatches for the Ambassador; and the bag contained two or three private letters for our hero. One was from his mother, stating that her health was much improved, that she had some prospect of letting Belmont Cottage, and that she hoped to be soon enabled to join her son in Naples. Another letter was from Agnes; and this epistle Charles read over and over again: but there was one paragraph to which he specially devoted his attention, and which made him regret that he had just now avoided an interview with the English gentlemen and lady who had flitted into the jeweller's shop. He was therefore resolved to seek them, or at least the lady—which was by no means difficult in a city where the names and addresses of all new-comers were registered at the chief office of police. It was the habit for English visitors of distinction and gentility to leave their cards at the British Embassy; but Charles scarcely thought that those who were now occupying his attention would have ventured to take such a step. He however consulted the visitor's book in the hall of the ambassadorial mansion; but he found not the names inscribed upon its pages. He therefore set out for the purpose of pursuing his inquiries at the Prefecture of Police; and on arriving at that office, he put the requisite question. The answer was given him; and he now learnt that the English gentleman and lady had been two days in Naples, and were

living at an hotel chiefly frequented by travellers of distinction. To that establishment Charles bent his way; and on making an inquiry at the porter's lodge, he learnt that the gentleman was out, but that the lady was in her apartment. A bell was rung—a waiter answered the summons—and our hero was conducted to that lady's sitting-room.

He found her alone; she was reclining languidly upon a sofa; and as he entered she partially raised herself, extending her hand, and saying with a half-smile and with a slight blush, "I was not altogether unprepared, Mr. De Vere, for this visit."

Charles took the hand thus proffered him: but he did not immediately speak. He bent upon the lady a look of mingled commiseration and sorrow; and then he placed himself in the chair which she indicated. The confusion on her part was transitory: or at least whatsoever she might have internally felt, soon ceased to be betrayed by the expression of her countenance; so that Charles could not help sighing as he thought that there was a certain degree of hardihood in the demeanour which she was thus so quickly able to assume. She was dressed with exceeding richness—indeed almost with a splendour which rose predominant above elegance and taste; and there was a slight savour of meretriciousness in her toilet. The low *corsage* displayed somewhat too much of the luxuriant contours of the bust; and there was altogether a voluptuous abandonment in the way in which she resumed her lounging, half-reclining position when she had shaken hands with De Vere. A tincture of sensuousness mingled with the natural glowing richness which characterized her whole person: there was a certain boldness in the expression of her large dark eyes, the luminousness of which seemed to swim in a soft languor: and the skirt of the robe was drawn just high enough—it might be by accident, or it might be by a studied coquettish design—to display one exquisitely-shaped foot and symmetrically-rounded ankle. Her taper fingers were resplendent with rings; the diamond ear-drops flashed forth their jets of light from amidst the heavy tresses of her glossy raven hair; and a superb necklace defined, so to speak, the swell of the bosom. Altogether, in that attitude of soft sensuous abandonment—with those looks—and in that garb,—reclining upon the luxurious cushions of the sofa, in a handsomely-furnished apartment, where the atmosphere was warm and perfumed,—this lady was a being full well calculated to make an impression upon the passions, if not actually upon the heart of any man whose affections and allegiance were not already most faithfully devoted to another.

"You say, Floribel," said Charles, at length breaking silence, and speaking in a grave tone, "that you were not altogether unprepared to meet me in Naples: and yet just now you avoided me—you retreated into a shop in company with him whom I wish to God that I might call your husband!"

"I am very much obliged to you, Charles," responded Floribel, with a haughty sarcasm in her accents, "for expressing this wish, but perhaps it is not altogether consistent with my own feelings."

"Good heavens! what mean you, Floribel?"

demanding our young hero, astonished and even distressed at the singular speech he had just heard.

"You would not wish to be a wedded wife——"
"I did not say so," interrupted the lady—"I did not even give you to understand thus much. But what I meant—what you may understand—and what I emphatically proclaim, is that I have no wish to be the wedded wife of Theodore Clifford."

"Floribel, you pain me infinitely!" said Charles; "and if your cousin Agnes were present, she would be profoundly distressed to hear you thus speak."

"But Agnes is not here," answered Floribel flippantly; "and even if she were, I should tell the truth if the topic arose; for I cannot control my own sentiments, and I care not to conceal them."

"Ah!" ejaculated Charles, "I understand!"—and now the feeling of commiseration on Floribel's behalf again took possession of his soul. "You are not altogether happy with Mr. Clifford——"

"Listen to me, Charles!" said Floribel: "for as we have met, I will be frank and explicit with you. For a moment I would have avoided this meeting; yet it was only a transient feeling of weakness on my part—because as I knew you were at Naples, I should not have consented to come hither at all if I had been too bashful and diffident, or too shamefaced to encounter your looks. But listen to me! I thought, when I eloped with Mr. Clifford, that I loved him; and there, were doubtless all the elements of love in my heart—but they required to be fostered, to be evoked, and to be developed by the genial warmth of kindness on his part. He began by deceiving me. That incident was alone sufficient to throw an ice-chill upon the feelings which were merely nascent and germinating in my bosom. He continued his course of deception—he assured me that he would speedily obtain the consent of his father to our union,—until wearied and rendered suspicious by his excuses, I took the matter into my own hands and wrote to Lord Windermere. The answer which I received convinced me of all Theodore's perfidy. In short, Charles, from this and various other instances I discovered that he had never intended to bestow upon me the sacred title of wife; but that it was all along a studied seduction, and that I was therefore a victim and a dupe! Do you suppose that I can love such a man as this—or that I could desire our destinies to be indissolubly linked?"

Charles made no answer: but his looks continued to indicate mingled commiseration and distress.

"But this is not all," proceeded Floribel. "My connexion with Theodore Clifford—I mean from the date that I was foolish enough to elope with him—has only lasted exactly six weeks; and during these six weeks I have as completely fathomed his character as if we had been intimate for as many years. He is selfish, deceitful, and unprincipled. I do not hesitate to add that he is a thorough villain——"

"Good heavens, Floribel!" said Charles, in astonishment and even with terror; "what a picture are you drawing of this young man! And yet you still live with him?"

"I have two answers to give to these observations on your part," replied Floribel. "First, in reference to the picture which I am drawing of

Theodore Clifford, I deliberately and positively affirm that it is in no way exaggerated. You shall judge for yourself. Accident one day threw into my way his pocket-book, in which I found several letters. One was from a young lady whom he had seduced while privately paying his addressee to her——”

“Is this possible?” exclaimed Charles, indignantly.

“I tell you that I read the letter with my own eyes,” responded Floribel. “I do not know who the young lady is—there was no signature to the letter—heaven knows she had reason enough for observing the strictest caution, as her parents were unacquainted with her position at the time she wrote—though they can scarcely be so any longer, for ere this she must have become a mother! I gathered from the letter that she belongs to a high family—a family bearing a proud title and enjoying great consideration in the world. That she herself was well-educated, was evident from the style in which she wrote: that she was amiable, affectionate, and loving was likewise demonstrated by that letter. And this young lady had been basely seduced by Theodore Clifford; and she was in a way to become a mother at the very time when he poured forth the protestations of love and devotion in my ears! Now, Charles, is not this man a villain?”

“It is indeed difficult to find a term too severe to be applied to such conduct,” responded our hero. “But still, Floribel, you are living with a man whom you appear to hate—whom at least you scorn and despise——”

“That is the second point on which I was about to speak,” resumed the young lady. “I have not suffered Theodore Clifford to suspect the extent to which I am acquainted with his iniquities: I have dissembled somewhat. And why? you will ask. As a matter of policy. For the present I am totally dependent upon him—I have no money of my own—at least none that I choose to touch, for I have given Agnes everything which I myself might claim; and therefore, as I could not go forth into the streets and beg, I have been compelled to remain with Clifford. He does not love me with any sincerity of sentiment: I know perfectly well what his feeling is:—and then after a brief pause, and with a slight colouring of the cheeks, Floribel added, “Theodore likes me just as any gay and profligate libertine likes a handsome mistress.”

“Heavens, Floribel!” exclaimed Charles, in accents of affliction, “what an existence is this which you are leading! Oh, how different from the time when happy and innocent, in the society of your amiable cousin, at your picturesque villa——”

“Do not allude to those times!” interrupted Floribel quickly: “do not allude to those circumstances! My destiny is cast; and I have accepted it. Oh! you have yet to learn, Mr. De Vere—or I beg pardon for this formality; for as you are to marry my cousin, I may continue to call you Charles as you call me Floribel—But I was about to say, Charles, that you do not know how altered my mind has lately become, and how philosophically I now look upon things in general. Of course I cannot blind myself to the fact that I may never hope to bear the sacred name of wife;

but I must live—my disposition is such that I cannot live unless it be luxuriously—I could not face poverty—and there is no earthly thing in the form of honest labour or honourable employment to which I can turn my hand. I know therefore what my career must be—and I shall accept it!”

“Floribel, you are talking in a strain which fills me with great affliction!” ejaculated De Vere, wondering likewise why she should be thus boldly candid and hardly frank in all her avowals.

“I am sorry that I give you pain, Charles,” she said, with a sort of indolent tranquillity; “but remember that it was not I who sought this interview—it is you who have come to me. For myself I would have avoided it; and of this you have had a proof. But still I knew that we should meet; and I made up my mind that if this were the case, I would enter into the fullest explanations. I will tell you wherefore. It is that you may henceforth avoid the society of one who feels herself to be unworthy of your notice!—it is that you may pass me by in the street without acknowledging me, and likewise without fearing that you will give offence by thus leaving me unnoticed! And it is also that I may be spared all moral lectures—all entreaties to turn away from the path on which I have entered—all those representations, remonstrances, intercessions, and prayers, with which Agnes has no doubt already charged you, should you happen to fall in with me——”

“This very day, Floribel,” interjected Charles, “have I received a letter from Agnes; and in that letter your name is mentioned in terms the most affectionate, but likewise the most sorrowful: for she knew that you were coming to Italy.”

“Yes—we had a parting interview, and I told her so,” observed Floribel.

“She beseeches me to see you,” continued De Vere,—“to implore that you will either insist that Theodore gives you the name of wife, or that you will at once abandon him——”

“Did I not foresee,” interjected Floribel, somewhat impatiently, “that all these representations, remonstrances, and entreaties would be made? But they are useless, Charles; and I would seek to avoid them. This is why I have dealt so frankly with you. Perhaps in the same spirit I may confess that I grieve—yes, grieve bitterly—at having severed the ties which bound me to my cousin; but the evil is done, and it is irreparable! I know what I am: I know what I must continue to be!”

“No, Floribel!” cried Charles; “you must not continue to be a degraded and disgraced creature! Leave this Theodore Clifford! If you will not return to your cousin, my mother shall give you a home—I know she will—I can confidently promise it——”

“Enough, Charles!” interrupted Floribel: “I thank you—but it must not be. I will go nowhere to bring disgrace and shame on those who receive me. This I wish to be thoroughly understood; and if I am dealing so frankly with you, it is that you may tranquillize the mind of Agnes on my behalf—I mean you may give her to understand that it is useless for her to agitate and distress herself on my account—but that henceforth she had better look upon me as one dead!”

“Agnes will never cease to be interested in you!” exclaimed Charles vehemently. “Do you

know, Floribel, that it is a shocking thing for a young creature of your age—only just eighteen—to speak as you have been speaking—to accept with so criminal a philosophy a career which it is vain and futile to describe as your fixed destiny, inasmuch as by a single resolute act you can change all this—and even if you cannot repair the past, you may at least abstain from erring for the future!”

“And I have neither the courage nor the inclination to take that resolute step,” answered Floribel. “I know that I have fallen—and a fallen creature I must remain. I would not return into the midst of moral and virtuous society, to be merely tolerated there. I have a certain pride after my own fashion. And moreover,” she added, the seriousness of her tone and looks relapsing into an indolent carelessness and a languid indifference, “I am formed only for a life of pleasure—and a life of pleasure I will lead. My whole constitution—my habits, my ideas, my temperament—are typical of pleasure. Pleasure is the very name which ought to have been given to me!”

“Floribel!” exclaimed Charles, starting up to his feet, “this is language which—but no! you cannot be serious—or else you must be very unhappy, and sorrow has produced its influences upon your brain!”—and our hero resumed his seat, almost with a feeling of remorse at the abruptness with which he had an instant before acted.

“I have no doubt,” said Floribel, quietly, “that you are disgusted with me—because I know you to be good and virtuous; and thank God that you are so,” she added emphatically, “because you are to become the husband of my cousin! But again I tell you that if I am thus frank in revealing myself thoroughly to you—if I may even appear indelicate or bold in unmasking myself—it is because I wish you to abstain from those remonstrances and representations which are indeed utterly useless. Ah! perhaps you wonder why I should have come to Naples; and I will tell you. When I returned to London with Theodore Clifford, after my elopement, he furnished a house sumptuously for me—paid for everything in my name—and thus invested me with the property so procured. But we had not been long at that house when I found that he was overwhelmed with debts, and that he had raised money upon bills in order to fit up the establishment, buy horses, carriages, and so forth. As I have already told you, I wrote to his father Lord Windermere, requiring that nobleman’s consent to our union. On the same day Theodore was arrested for a considerable sum of money and taken to a lock-up house. My letter to his father had rendered his lordship so deeply indignant that when his son wrote to him from the lock-up house, he sent back the letter in a blank envelope. This mischief was therefore wrought by me—though I had a perfect right to act as circumstances had suggested. Still I had taken a step which suddenly cut off Theodore’s resources, and the consequence of which was that he found himself threatened with a protracted imprisonment. He entreated me to effect his release on certain terms which his creditor proposed. I yielded—and I signed some document.

This, it appears, was what is called a warrant-of-attorney, assigning all the furniture, equipages, and so forth to the creditor, who on obtaining the security released Theodore from incarceration and promised to give him ample time to liquidate the liability. But the faithless creditor at once availed himself of the power which the deed gave him; and he swept away everything. Lord Windermere refused to see his son—other debts became pressing—and Theodore found himself compelled to leave England. I was by no means sorry, as I wished to avoid the chance of meeting those whom in different circumstances I had known. But whither should we go? That was the question. At length Theodore recollected that he had in Naples a most intimate friend—a man of wealth—you know him, Charles—I allude to Sir Alexander Holcroft.”

“The senior attaché to the British Embassy!” ejaculated our hero.

“The same,” rejoined Floribel. “Theodore has now gone to seek his friend Sir Alexander. I must tell you that some two years ago—before Sir Alexander succeeded, by an infant nephew’s death, to that title and those estates which he had never hoped to inherit—he was very poor, and Theodore lent him a few hundred pounds. They have since lost sight of each other; and for this reason the debt has never been paid. Theodore has now gone to request its liquidation—a demand that will immediately be complied with; for Sir Alexander has become rich. This is the reason we are at Naples.”

Floribel ceased speaking; and for some minutes Charles De Vers remained absorbed in profound reflection. He longed to renew his entreaties that Floribel would quit the man whom she scorned and hated, and adopt a virtuous course; but when he retrospected over all she had said, he saw how utterly useless it was to return to the topic. He had urged enough to fulfil the earnest injunctions conveyed in that paragraph of his beloved Agnes Evelyn’s letter; and he could say no more. He therefore rose to take his departure—but he lingered, bending upon Floribel a look of earnest entreaty.

“You are about to bid me farewell, Charles,” she said; “and you must bear in mind what I have already told you, to the effect that if you choose henceforth to pass me by unnoticed, should we ever again happen to meet, you will be giving me no offence; and you must not in any way compromise yourself through the generous consideration that being the cousin of your Agnes I ought to receive a certain courtesy of treatment at your hands.”

Charles was deeply affected; and he could not give utterance to a word. But a short time back he had known Floribel in her innocence and virtue; and all that he now beheld before him was a complete moral wreck. True, the same Floribel was there in all the Hebe-like glow of her beauty; and perhaps never had she seemed more handsome. But the diadem of purity had fallen from her brow; and there was already a metreticulous hardihood in her looks—an atmosphere of sensuousness enveloping her. Yes—it was a moral wreck, which it pained the generous-hearted and well-principled Charles De Vers to gaze upon,—and all the more so because his lips were now

sealed by a consciousness of the futility of any endeavour on his part to drag her away from amidst the waves of destruction and restore her to a harbour of safety. He wrung her hand with a warmth of feeling the nature of which she fully comprehended; and for a moment there was a slight quivering of her lips and her eyelids. But it was only for a moment: she quickly regained her complete self-possession; and returning the pressure of his hand, she resumed her seat on the sofa whence she had risen up.

Charles hastened from the room; and as he again found himself roaming through the streets, he mentally ejaculated, "Alas, poor lost Floribel! what can I write concerning thee to Agnes?"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SIR ALEXANDER HOLCROFT.

CHARLES did not on that day visit the house where *Nino Corso* dwelt, for the hour was late in the afternoon when he took leave of Floribel, and he had only just time to return to the Embassy and dress for dinner. Besides, even if there had been leisure to pay a visit to the guardians to whom he had confided *Ginevra's* infant child, he had not the inclination; for his mind was painfully absorbed with everything that he had heard from the lips of Floribel.

He dined at the Ambassador's table; and on this day there was no one present besides the Ambassador himself and the principal persons belonging to the Embassy. Charles happened to sit next to Sir Alexander Holcroft. This was a gentleman of four-and-thirty years of age—tall and good-looking—with pleasing manners and distinguished appearance. His elder brother had died about three years back, leaving an infant son. Alexander had been for some time at variance with his brother, who had refused to minister to his extravagancies. Alexander was steeped in debts and poverty when the intelligence suddenly reached him that his little nephew had died of convulsions; and thus all in a moment he found himself a baronet as well as the possessor of a magnificent estate. He now resolved to turn over a new leaf, and become as steady as he was formerly wild and profligate. We will not pause to describe how it was that he had taken a fancy to the sphere of diplomacy—but so it happened; and with his rank and fortune he found it by no means difficult to obtain an appointment which might speedily lead to a higher rank in the diplomatic sphere. In respect to the fair sex, Sir Alexander Holcroft still continued gay, unprincipled, and profligate as ever; but he had utterly renounced the vice of gaming and those low debaucheries in which he was wont formerly to indulge. Such was the individual by whose side Charles was seated at the Ambassador's table.

"By the bye, De Vere," said Sir Alexander, during the desert, and lowering his voice almost to a whisper, "I received a visit to-day from some one who has a slight acquaintance with yourself."

"Indeed?" observed Charles, with an assumed air of carelessness.

"Yes. You know Clifford—Theodora Clifford I mean—Lord Windermere's son," continued Sir Alexander: "he is a fine fellow in his way, and showed kindness to me at a period when I was not quite so well off as I am at present."

"I happen to know that he is in Naples," remarked De Vere. "But, as you observe, my acquaintance with Mr. Clifford is slight."

"He spoke of you in very high terms," said Sir Alexander; "and he was telling me how gallantly you behaved in a little affair which you had with Hardress, Lord Mendlesham's son, a few months ago."

"I am exceedingly obliged to Mr. Clifford," said Charles, somewhat coldly, "for having been pleased to mention my name with respect—though, to tell you the truth, Sir Alexander, it would be impossible for him to speak of me otherwise."

"No doubt, my dear fellow," rejoined the Baronet. "Poor Clifford does not appear to be in the highest possible feather; and I should be pleased had he come to me in better form—I mean in respect to his finances. Between you and me, De Vere, I don't mind adding that there was a little matter of some five hundred guineas which I owed Clifford—a thing that had stood over simply because we somehow or another lost sight of each other, and he did not apply to me for it: but I settled with him to-day—and since I am telling secrets, I may as well make the tale complete by stating that I was not unmindful of former kindness; and so I wrote him a cheque for a thousand."

"It was very liberal on your part, Sir Alexander," replied De Vere.

"Not liberal," said the Baronet: "it was a duty under the circumstances. I am going to dine with Clifford to-morrow: he tells me that he has a lady living with him—the handsomest creature that ever was seen——"

"Mr. Clifford was communicative, then?" interjected Charles: and he mentally added, "But at all events it appears he was delicate enough not to state who the young lady is, or that I am going to marry her cousin."

"But handsome though this mistress of Clifford's is," continued Sir Alexander, in a careless conversational manner, "he seems to be getting tired of her."

"Indeed!" ejaculated De Vere, with difficulty concealing the indignation and disgust which he experienced at the terms in which the unprincipled Theodore Clifford must evidently have spoken of the unfortunate Floribel, to leave such an impression on the Baronet's mind.

"Yes—he is tired of her," proceeded Sir Alexander: "but he tells me that there are reasons why he must keep her as long as she chooses to cling to him—though he did not explain what these reasons were. Of course, however, as a man of the world I can understand them,—a little bit of seduction—a girl enticed from her home—and so forth. Ah! it is the old tale!"—and Sir Alexander sipped his wine as if it were a matter of the most trivial consequence and a mere ordinary affair of every-day life to which he had thus alluded.

"Does Mr. Clifford purport to make a long stay in Naples?" inquired Charles.

"He is perfectly undecided: he has quarrelled with his father on account of this very girl of whom we were talking—he is overwhelmed with debts in England—and he must therefore remain abroad until the old nobleman gets into a better mood and comes down handsomely with the cash. In the meanwhile Clifford must remain somewhere on the Continent—though if he has no other resources than the cheque which I gave him this afternoon," added the Baronet, "the sum will not last him very long."

"A thousand guineas in this cheap country," observed Charles, "ought to last him for at least six months."

"It would last you twelve or even twenty-four, De Vere," responded the Baronet, laughing: "because you are not extravagant, and you have no small vices. But Clifford is addicted to this, you know:"—and Sir Alexander imitated with his wineglass the shaking of a dice box and the throwing out of the dice upon the table.

At this moment the Ambassador rose from his seat, coffee having been announced; and the party proceeded to the drawing-room, so that the conversation between our hero and Sir Alexander was thus cut short. When Charles retired to his own chamber, he reviewed all that he had heard from the Baronet's lips, and he reflected thereupon.

"It is quite clear," he said to himself, "that Clifford has not in any way mentioned me as an acquaintance of Floribel or as being engaged to her cousin. Perhaps this is as well. Shall I see Floribel once more and delicately whisper to her how lightly and ungenerously Theodore speaks of her to his friends? No! of what avail? Alas, they are evidently both dissembling,—he his weariness of her, she her hatred and loathing for his treacherous character. Besides, she will not thank me for interfering between herself and him; and all that passed betwixt herself and me proves that she wishes the farewell which closed our interview to be an eternal one."

On the following day, between eleven and twelve in the forenoon, Charles set out to visit Nino Corso's abode. As he passed the church where he had twice seen Ginevra, he for a moment felt an inclination to turn his steps across the threshold of the sacred edifice; but he checked himself, mentally ejaculating, "Why should I seek to penetrate more profoundly into these affairs until Ginevra herself shall indicate the period for the elucidation of the mystery?"

He accordingly continued his way; and in a short time he reached the street where Nino Corso dwelt. Charles had not forgotten the incident in respect to the cloaked stranger whom he had seen gliding so rapidly across the landing on the occasion of his preceding visit; and he wondered whether he would on this occasion behold anything of that individual. With this idea in his mind he ascended the staircase: he reached the uppermost landing—and he knocked at the door of Nino Corso's apartment. He fancied that a voice bade him enter: but on opening the door, he at once perceived that he must have been mistaken, from the sudden confusion which his presence produced. Benedetta—who was seated on one side of the fireplace, with the infant child in her arms—half started from her chair; and it even

struck our hero that a low ejaculation of alarm burst from her lips. But on this point he was not sure: certain however it was that Benedetta instantaneously regained her self-possession on perceiving who the visitor was. On the other side of the fireplace an individual was seated, whom Charles at once felt convinced could be none other than the cloaked stranger whom he had seen so mysteriously flitting across the landing on the former occasion of his visit: for over the back of the chair was thrown the ample cloak itself which had enveloped him on that occasion. This personage likewise half-started from his seat, as Benedetta had done; and his keen dark eyes were riveted with a searching scrutiny upon the countenance of our hero. He was a man of distinguished appearance, and evidently moving in a sphere far superior to that of the humble tenants of the room where he seemed to be a familiar visitor. His age might be about forty-five: he was dressed in black, and a massive gold chain festooned over his waistcoat. He was tall and thin—perfectly upright, with a genteel symmetrical figure. His hair, naturally black, was streaked with grey: he wore neither beard nor whiskers—his face was clean shaven—and the bluish dark hue which indicated where the beard had thus been cut off, threw out into stronger relief the sallowness of his complexion. There were deep lines of thought across his brow: his dark eyes were piercing as those of a hawk; and his thin compressed lips were indicative of a firm resolute character. His face might be termed handsome, so far as the regularity of the features was concerned: but the extreme sallowness of the complexion, mingling with a certain severity or even sternness of the general expression, marred whatsoever effect that well-formed profile might otherwise have produced. That he was an Italian our hero had no doubt.

Nino Corso was not present in the room: but the children were.

Charles De Vere, on crossing the threshold of the little apartment, stopped short with the air of one who seemed to feel that he was an intruder, and who was thrown into the sudden embarrassment of not knowing whether he should remain or retreat. The stranger bent upon him, as we have already said, the keenest and most scrutinising regards: Charles glanced towards Benedetta, who at the very moment rose from her seat as if to attract the stranger's attention; and having done so, she made a quick significant sign. All this was the work of a moment: but it escaped not our hero's notice.

"I am afraid that I am intruding," Charles immediately said: "but I knocked at the door——"

"We did not hear you, signor," interjected Benedetta: "but if we had, it would have been all the same—I mean that I should have bidden you welcome."

Meanwhile the dark-eyed stranger was again contemplating young De Vere with the most earnest attention; and abruptly rising from his seat, he took our hero's hand, saying with rapid utterance, "You are an Englishman—you are a young man of honour—frankness and generosity are stamped upon your brow—and I appeal to you as strongly as one human being can appeal to an-

other, not to breathe a syllable elsewhere of having seen me beneath this roof!"

"I do not know you, signor," answered Charles; "and therefore I cannot speak of you by name."

"But you might speak of me according to personal description," responded the stranger; "and it is in this that I throw myself upon your mercy."

"The English gentleman will pass his word and will keep it," said Nino Corso, who entered the room at this moment; and he carefully closed the door behind him.

Charles was infinitely relieved by this man's appearance and by the words which he had just spoken; for they at once set at rest whatsoever suspicion there might have been in his mind in respect to the fact of the stranger being a second time alone with Benedetta. It was now therefore with all the natural frankness of his disposition that Charles exclaimed, "If there be no moral wrong in keeping your secret, signor, rest assured that it shall be kept by me!"

"I seek no other pledge, and can desire no better," answered the stranger with a look expressive of deep gratitude. "But remember! a single word lightly or incautiously spoken——"

"That word shall not be spoken by me," rejoined Charles, "so long as I may in all honour keep silence."

"Enough, young man!" ejaculated the stranger. "You have secured the gratitude of one who when occasion serves, knows how to be grateful!"

He again wrung our hero's hand: he then enveloped himself in his ample cloak—and when Nino Corso had peeped forth from the door to ascertain that the coast was completely clear, the mysterious individual sped across the landing to the opposite room.

"Welcome, signor," said Corso, now finding leisure to pay his respects to Charles. "I am not sorry that this little incident should have occurred; because it has cleared up my poor Benedetta's character in your estimation: for I know that the day before yesterday you must have entertained a suspicion—it was natural enough, though unjust and injurious——"

"Your wife behaved well on the occasion," interrupted Charles: "there was evidently some great secret the betrayal of which from her lips might have at once convinced me that I was wronging her: but she held her peace, though she gave me significantly enough to understand that appearances were not always to be judged by."

"Perhaps you will scarcely require to be told, signor," demanded Corso, "that there is something delicate and peculiar in this business—a merchant who has failed—a worthy good man, but who is thus obliged to hide himself from the pursuit of his creditors until his friends can make arrangements by which he may show himself again in the broad light of day."

"I fancied," rejoined Charles, "after what little I heard, that this was either the case of some political offender or else of a debtor; for the unfortunate gentleman does not look like a criminal—and I have too good an opinion of you both, my humble friends, to imagine that you would become accomplices in cheating justice of its due."

"Not for worlds!" exclaimed Corso, with honest sincerity, "where it is *really* its due that justice claims. But here is a case of sheer misfortune——"

"And I honour you for befriending it!" interjected Charles. "The secret is safe with me: of this you may rest assured—and therefore now no more upon the subject, unless it be for me to recommend you to exercise a little more discretion and prudence——"

"No one comes to our room," said Benedetta, "except that poor gentleman, the house-porter (who, by the way, is in the secret), and yourself, signor. I thought it was too early for a visit from you; and as the poor gentleman stepped across the landing just to have a quarter of an hour's chat—for he must be dull enough, pent up in his own chamber all by himself, he who has been accustomed to such an active bustling life——"

"No doubt, poor gentleman," interjected Charles: "he must deeply feel his altered position. But I repeat, his secret is entirely safe with me. And now tell me, how gets on the little one?"

"Well and thriving, as you see, signor," answered Benedetta, holding up the sleeping babe, on whose delicate forehead Charles imprinted a kiss. "Though deprived of the natural nourishment of its mother's bosom," continued Benedetta, "it does not pine but takes its food readily; so that one would really think it had never hung at the breast at all, and had been fed by hand from its birth."

Charles said nothing: but he thought this idea on Benedetta's part was likely to be altogether consistent with the actual facts. He paid some little kind attention to the children of the worthy couple, who were all present in the room; and he then took his departure. As he was proceeding homeward, he could not help wondering within himself when Ginerva would communicate with him according to her promise, and what latitude she meant to give herself in respect to the "few days" within which period according to her pledge such communication was to be made.

On the following day Charles De Vere was walking through the streets in the afternoon—indeed as it was verging towards the hour to dress for dinner—when he was overtaken by Sir Alexander Holcroft.

"You are going home to the Embassy, De Vere," said the Baronet, familiarly passing his arm through that of our young hero; "and my destination is the same. By the bye, I dined yesterday with Clifford at his hotel, as I told you that I was going to do; and I was introduced to his lady, who of course passes for the noones as his wife."

"And you saw the lady?" said Charles, endeavouring to assume a careless look and tone.

"I tell you, my dear fellow," replied the Baronet, laughing, "I was introduced to her: so of course I saw her. I never passed a more agreeable evening! Her name is Floribel—she is a superb creature, and evidently well educated. How Clifford can possibly be tired of such a Hebe I cannot for the life of me conceive!"

"He is doubtless volatile," said Charles.

"Volatile or not," continued the Baronet, "it would be unpardonable on his part to dream of ridling himself of such a houri, if it were not that some one else must sooner or later have very good



reason to forgive him for his want of constancy and taste."

"I do not exactly comprehend you, Sir Alexander."

"Why, I mean, my young friend, that some one must take Floribel off Clifford's hands; and whoever the lucky individual may be, he will have reason to thank his stars that Clifford should so indifferently appreciate the treasure of voluptuous beauty which he possesses."

Charles bit his lip, and a glow of indignation flushed his cheeks at the thought that the cousin of the pure and chaste Agnes should thus form the topic of light discourse on the part of a libertine. But he curbed his resentment; for in fact there was nothing which he himself could reasonably resent, and his momentary anger was absorbed in a silent sigh of sorrow as the conviction struck him that Floribel had drawn down all this upon herself, and that she was wickedly and wantonly

pursuing a career which must ever lay her open to be thus spoken of with levity.

"I have just been to pay my respects at the hotel, after dining there last night," resumed the Baronet, not noticing those transient evidences of indignation on De Vere's part; "and I have passed another agreeable hour with Floribel. Clifford was out—the lady was in a very excellent humour, and in good spirits: she chatted gaily — what music is there in her voice! She smiled and laughed — what delicious lips! and what brilliant teeth!"

"And did you see Mr Clifford to-day?" inquired Charles, scarcely knowing what he said; for he keenly felt all the awkwardness and embarrassment of his position in being compelled thus to listen to a libertine's comments on the attractions of the cousin of Agnes.

"No:—Clifford was absent the whole time," responded Sir Alexander; "and to tell you the

truth I think the rogue had a motive. But no matter! If I am bitten it will be with my own consent, and I shall be enabled to afford my friend Theodore permission to chuckle in his sleeve afterwards."

"What do you mean?" inquired Charles.

"My dear friend, how innocent you are!" exclaimed the Baronet. "Do you not perceive that Theodore Clifford being tired of his lady, or perhaps not able to maintain her, wants to get rid of her; and he thinks to himself—'Why not palm her off on my friend Sir Alexander Holcroft, as well as on any one else?'—Clifford is a man of the world, you know; and this is just the way one tries to serve one's friends."

"But if you really think so, Sir Alexander," exclaimed Charles De Vere, indignant and disgusted in more senses than one, "it ought to be the very reason why you should carefully abstain from seeing Clifford any more—or—or—"

"Why, my dear fellow," cried the Baronet, laughing, "I shall really begin to think that you are smitten by the description I have given you of this lady, and that you mean to look out for her on your own behalf!"

"Sir Alexander," said Charles, stopping short in the middle of the street—and the colour went and came in rapid transitions upon his countenance: "it is almost an insult—But no! you did not mean it," exclaimed our hero, thus suddenly recollecting and interrupting himself. "I beg your pardon for my seeming impetuosity—"

"Well, your behaviour was positively somewhat singular," said the Baronet coldly. "However," he went on to observe, immediately resuming the wonted off-hand friendly familiarity of his demeanour, and again passing his arm through that of our hero, "I suppose that the hint I almost jestingly threw out offended your strict notions of propriety; and I ought to beg your pardon rather than you beg mine. But we were talking of the suspicion I entertain that Clifford may perhaps be manoeuvring to pass off his mistress on me; and you think that I ought to be offended with him for entertaining such a project? Now, my dear friend, you are quite wrong. There are certain things which may be done amongst gentlemen without any forfeiture of an honourable reputation. I see that you are somewhat of a novice in these kinds of affairs; and therefore I will give you a little insight into them. Now, for instance, it is just as fair—and just as usual too—that a man should endeavour to palm off upon his friend a mistress of whom he is tired, as that he should do pretty nearly the same thing with respect to a horse. You look surprised at the illustration: but I mean what I say. It is quite a common thing for a gentleman to palm off upon his friend an unsound, vicious, and made-up brute of a horse for a sound, docile, faultless animal."

"But this," exclaimed Charles, "is both lying and cheating!"

"Hush, hush, my dear friend! these are all the conventionalisms of life—and every grade of society has its peculiar conventionalisms. Thus, for instance, in the commercial class, supposing I kept a mere office for business, and you entrusted me with five or ten thousand pounds, and I lived upon your money till it was all spent,—it would be fraud, robbery, and swindling. But mark the difference

if I happen to put a brass plate on my door, with the word **BANKER** upon it! Why, then I might live riotously and luxuriously upon your money, and it would be all legitimate enough. I will give you another illustration. If I keep a little chandler's shop, my whole stock in trade being worth fifty pounds—and in order to increase my business I get into debt for goods to the amount of eighty or a hundred more,—if I fail I go to the Insolvent's Court—get terribly blown up by the Commissioner as well as bullied by the barristers—and I am remanded to prison for six months for having contracted debts without a reasonable prospect of paying them. But now suppose that with scarcely a shilling in my pocket I go and take a splendid office in the City—furnish it sumptuously upon credit—call myself a speculator, a contractor, and so forth—get hold of people's money, and fail for a quarter of a million,—I go to the Bankruptcy Court—I am treated civilly by the Commissioner—I am mildly questioned by the barristers—and I receive a certificate discharging me from all liabilities and setting me free to commence similar operations anew. This is the difference in our glorious Old England of doing things in a petty chandler's-shop way or doing them wholesale by thousands."

"I know that everything you have told me is true," observed Charles De Vere: "but I was never before led to reflect upon it so seriously."

"Well, my dear fellow," continued Sir Alexander Holcroft, with the self-complacency of an experienced instructor who was teaching the young idea how to shoot, "every grade of society has its conventionalisms of various kinds and species. The old ladies who go to Missionary and Bible meetings at Exeter Hall, pour forth tears ostentatiously from their eyes—and stealthily, under cover of their white kerchiefs, pour the contents of their brandy-bottles down their throats. But they are pious people—and their piety covers all their sins. Again, the highest nobleman in the land—who is perhaps a Cabinet Minister or has been one, and whose sense of honour is supposed to be as delicate as the reputation of Cæsar's wife that must not even be breathed upon—becomes quite another being when on the Turf, at Newmarket or at Tattersall's. He will then and there freely fraternise with all sorts of notorious persons—blacklegs, swindlers, and horse-chauvers: he will lay his bets according to any private information he may have most improperly received; and he will take his winnings from hands which in other places and other circumstances he would recoil from touching. In short, he may plunge headlong amidst all these vile contaminations, and according to conventional opinion he himself will come forth uncontaminated: he may touch all that pitch, and yet not a single voice shall be raised to proclaim him defiled. Nay, more—suppose that one of these Turf friends of his be charged with some heinous crime—even murder if you will—and when the villain stands in the felon's dock at the Old Bailey, our high and honourable nobleman will make his appearance upon the bench to show his interest in the case, and perhaps to display his sympathy with his former Turf friend who is now in such sore trouble. These are facts, De Vere—and you must know that they are so."

"Yes," said Charles sorrowfully; "the conviction is again brought home to me that you are

drawing a true portraiture of society, without the slightest exaggeration."

"And if we pursue the subject a little further," continued Sir Alexander Holcroft, "it will afford us some curious illustrations of what I term the conventionalisms of society. Suppose, for instance, our high and powerful nobleman whom we are citing as an example, should have to appear before a magistrate in any case—either as a witness against some poor cabman who has demanded sixpence more than his fare, or else for being drunk and wrenching off a knocker, or something of that sort,—the magistrate will *not* ask anything about this nobleman's character, and the police will *not* crowd officiously forward to state that they saw him upon the race-course fraternising with blacklegs, swindlers, and sharpers. But only let some poor devil be taken before that same magistrate on the barest suspicion of having done something wrong, or merely on the vague charge of lurking about to commit a felony—and just mark the difference! The first question the magistrate puts is in reference to his character; and forthwith a swarm of police-officers crowd forward to declare that the accused has often been seen in the society of notoriously bad persons. Nothing more is needed: away with the wretch to prison and the treadmill! Now the fact is, *De Vere*, a great or a rich man is not damned by the reputation of evil associates—whereas on the other hand it is utter destruction to the poor devil."

"Again I must admit that your illustrations are correct," observed Charles: "but what a hideous state of society do they demonstrate!"

"Well," said the Baronet coolly, "that is just according to the light in which you may view the matter. But to come back to the original starting-point, you will now see that in the midst of a society where conventionalisms have established so many artificialities, inconsistencies, and anomalies, it is not astonishing if a friend may be permitted to play the rogue in respect to palming off a horse which is really worthless, or if he may be allowed to practise an astute game to palm off a mistress of whom he is tired. Therefore, all things considered, I have not the least right to be offended with Clifford in the present instance—supposing, understand me, that my suspicion is correct, and that he is actually endeavouring to transfer *la belle Floribel* from his own arms to mine."

Here the conversation ceased as the gate of the British Embassy was reached; and Charles retired to his own chamber, to dress for dinner, and to ponder with mingled pain, sorrow, and disgust upon the manner in which the name of Agnes Evelyn's cousin was mentioned by the lips of a voluptuary.

CHAPTER XL.

THE BILLET.

ON the following day, between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, Charles *De Vere*—who had been occupied in diplomatic business the whole of the morning—was passing out of the mansion

of the Embassy to take his accustomed walk, when the porter handed him a note which had only been left by a messenger a few minutes previously. Its contents ran as follow:—

"December 15, 1848

"MY DEAR CHARLES,

"Come to me for a few minutes between this hour and six o'clock, as I wish to speak to you: for we parted the other day in a manner which for certain reasons has since been painfully reflected upon by me.

"FLORIBEL."

Charles thrust, as he thought, this billet into his waistcoat pocket: but it in reality fell upon the pavement, he continuing his way unconscious of the circumstance. He was musing deeply, for he was at a loss how to act. When he had parted from Floribel he had thought it was with an understanding that they were to meet no more; and he most certainly was anxious to avoid the pain of another interview with the lost and dishonoured young lady who seemed to have made up her mind to adopt a career of profligacy as if it were a fated path from which there was no divergence. His first idea was therefore to step into some coffee-house and write a note to the effect that he declined to call upon Floribel, but that if there were any way in which he could with honour and propriety be of service to her, she had only to signify her commands by letter in order to have them obeyed. Yet a second thought made him resolve to adopt another course—indeed, the very opposite one, and to comply with Floribel's request for an interview. She was the cousin of his Agnes—Agnes loved her dearly in spite of her errors and frailties—and Agnes had moreover written to Charles entreating him to do his best, if circumstances permitted, to recall the strayed being into the path of rectitude. It was therefore a duty which our hero felt that he had to perform to see Floribel again; and he bent his steps in the direction of the hotel where she was residing with Mr. Clifford.

On reaching that establishment, he was at once conducted by a waiter to the apartment where he had seen Floribel a few days previously; and he found her reclining loungingly upon the sofa in that species of voluptuous abandonment which we have already described. On entering the room, Charles flung a glance of hasty scrutiny at her countenance, to ascertain whether she were touched by remorse and whether she had sent for him to communicate any new resolve in respect to her future proceedings: but her looks at once convinced him that he must entertain no hope of this kind. The same mingled holdness and sensuous languor as before still characterized the expression of her large dark eyes: her air, her position, everything bespoke the same feelings—the same state of mind, as when he had last seen her. She was the embodiment of voluptuousness in all its exquisite refinement.

She extended her hand towards him, saying, "You did not expect, Charles, that I should thus send for you; and our interview need only last for a few minutes. First of all I endeavoured to commit to paper what I had to say—but I was not

satisfied with the terms in which I worded it; and therefore I thought it would be better for us to meet again for a moment."

"I was in hopes, Floribel," replied De Vere gravely, as he took a seat, "that you might have reflected with sufficient seriousness—that you might have exercised your good sense—that not only for your own sake but for that of Agnes——"

"No moral lectures, Charles!" interrupted Floribel, with a half smile,—"although," she immediately added, "I fully appreciate the excellence of your intentions. It is about Agnes that I wish to speak to you. I think I told you the other day that when you wrote to her you might aspre her that my course was irrevocably taken—that she need not therefore agitate or distress herself on my account—but that she would do well to look upon me as one dead. Have you as yet written to Agnes?"

"I have not written to her since I saw you," answered De Vere mournfully; "for, in truth, I knew not exactly what to say. I cannot deceive her—and not for worlds could I have committed to paper all the things you said to me!"

"But you must deceive her, Charles, on this one point," responded Floribel; "yes, you must deceive her as you value her happiness and her peace of mind: for on mature reflection I feel that her's is a disposition that must be delicately dealt with. It was to speak to you on this subject that I desired the present interview."

"And in what sense would you have me deceive her?" inquired Charles.

"Did you not tell me the other day," proceeded Floribel, "that in the letter which you received from Agnes she expressed her desire that if you saw me you would insist that I should at once abandon Theodore unless he gave me the name of wife. Well then, I have determined to separate from Theodore immediately—this very evening—or to-morrow at latest——"

"And what do you purpose to do? whither are you going?" demanded Charles quickly.

"These are my secrets," rejoined Floribel, in a tone which deprecated farther questioning. "It is sufficient to meet the spirit of Agnes' letter to you that I separate from Theodore."

"No, Floribel!" exclaimed Charles vehemently; "is not sufficient, if you mean to pass to the protection of another!"

"But you must make it sufficient," responded Floribel: "you must seize upon the fact as a means of tranquillizing the mind of Agnes. Write to her—tell her that inasmuch as Theodore refuses to make me his wife, I have separated from him. Agnes, in the delicacy and generosity of her own mind, will at once put the most favourable construction on the announcement: she will think that I have returned into—into——what shall I call it?—well, the path that she desires. Tell her that it is my intention to remain altogether on the Continent—to bury myself in seclusion—and under a feigned name to conceal my identity from the knowledge of all who might in any way be distressed on my account. These assurances will to some extent appease her anxiety; it is an innocent deception—indeed, it is scarcely a deception; for in the main it is strictly true, because I am about to separate from Theodore, and I am about to take other names, so that

never henceforth shall I be known by those of Floribel Lister."

"Do for heaven's sake permit me," exclaimed Charles, "to present once more a few considerations to your mind——"

"Enough, Charles!" interrupted Floribel, rising from her seat: "here our interview ends. I have told you how to deal with Agnes on my account; and if you love her you will follow my suggestions. It is useless to afflict or distress her more than on my behalf she is already afflicted and distressed. The truth when unpleasant should not be always told: it would be the height of punctilious fastidiousness to adhere strictly to the letter of the truth in such circumstances. Nay, more—it would be cruel! Love and friendship often suggest the necessity of keeping back the full extent of calamity and misfortune. At all events I have now done everything that lies in my power: I have told you how to deal with Agnes—and I must leave you to follow your own course."

Having thus spoken, Floribel abruptly quitted the apartment by a door communicating with an inner room; and Charles found himself alone. He remained for a few instants in deep reflection upon all that she had said; and he could not help thinking that her concluding speech contained many truthful observations.

"Yes," he said to himself, as he slowly descended the staircase of the hotel, "it would indeed be cruel to afflict and distress Agnes! I would rather plunge a dagger into my own heart than cause her an additional pang? I will write to her in such a sense as will at least ease her mind somewhat; and if a little deception be practised, it will indeed be venial in this instance."

Charles De Vere was issuing from the hotel, with the resolution of returning at once to the ambassadorial mansion to sit down and pen a long letter to Agnes, when he found himself suddenly accosted by Mr. Egerton, another attaché to the British Embassy. This was a gentleman about eight-and-twenty years of age: he had formerly been in the Guards, and had acquired some little notoriety as a duellist. His countenance was now grave and serious, as he said, "De Vere, have the kindness to accompany me. I have a hackney-coach close at hand."

"Accompany you? Whither?" inquired our hero in astonishment.

"I will tell you as we proceed," replied Egerton. "Come, my dear fellow—be quick! for the matter admits of no delay. It is serious, I can assure you."

Charles hesitated no longer—but followed Mr. Egerton, who walked rapidly, to a little distance, where a hackney-vehicle was waiting. They stepped in; and the chaise at once drove away.

"Now," said Charles, "will you have the goodness, my dear Egerton, to inform me of the meaning of this strange proceeding on your part?"

"I have already told you that it was serious—and so it is in one sense, though to a gentleman it is often an absolute necessity. And, by the bye, as you have once before figured with considerable credit to yourself in a similar affair——"

"What on earth can you mean?" exclaimed Charles: for though he was suddenly smitten with the idea of a duel, yet he could not conjecture

whom he had so mortally offended as to provoke it.

"I mean, my dear fellow," rejoined Egerton, "that there is a certain person who considers himself ill used and outraged by your conduct; and I need only hint that there is a lady in the case——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Charles: and then he thought within himself, "I always had some vague notion that the affair would get me into a scrape!"—for his ideas now at once settled upon Silvia.

"I see that I have said enough," interjected Egerton; "and indeed the less that is said in such matters the better. We are proceeding to a convenient spot—all is settled—everything was arranged in a very few minutes: the other party undertook to provide the weapons—and I at once constituted myself your friend in the matter. I believe you are a good hand with the pistol—at least it is well known that you winged Hector Hardress——"

"But how came you to be involved in this present affair?" demanded Charles: "who spoke to you on the subject? who made the arrangements which you speak of?"

"Let alone all these questionings," exclaimed Egerton: "what matter such particulars? It is sufficient that all has been hitherto well and fairly done. During the rest of the ride tell me what little things you might in any way wish settled, if—you understand me—the worst should happen."

Charles De Vere did indeed perceive the necessity of thinking seriously on the point just suggested. He found himself suddenly involved in a duel: he was being hurried with the most indecent haste to the appointed spot; and he knew full well that to retreat would be to brand himself with cowardice—while even to demand a delay would render himself liable to some unpleasant suspicion. Still he thought that on reaching the ground explanations might be demanded on certain points, and thus the probability would arise of his self-exculpation from whatsoever offence might be charged against him. But, on the other hand, he resolved to prepare himself for the worst. He took out his pocket-book, and wrote in it a few lines addressed to his mother and to Agnes: he then closed the book and restored it to his pocket.

"If I fall, Egerton," he said, in a calm collected voice, "you will find that pocket-book about my person; and you will have the kindness to forward it to my mother in England. You will oblige me by adding a few lines of your own, to convey the assurance that it was not I who provoked this duel, and that it must have arisen from a complete misunderstanding of certain circumstances."

"I comprehend!" said Egerton. "Depend upon it that the affair shall be treated with all possible delicacy, not merely by myself, but by the opposite party."

By this time the hackney-coach was outside the suburbs of Naples; and in a few minutes it stopped under the wall of a ruined edifice, which had once been a celebrated monastery dedicated to St. Nicholas. Egerton and Charles alighted—the coachman was desired to wait—and having ekirted the wall, the two gentlemen passed into the midst of the ruins. On turning the angle of

a dilapidated tower, they came in sight of two other gentlemen at a little distance.

"Why, here are Holcroft and Winton!" exclaimed Charles,—Mr. Winton being also a gentleman belonging to the Embassy.

"Of course!" said Mr. Egerton, somewhat surprised at the ejaculation. "Ah, I see!—you are annoyed that they should be before us? Upon my soul, De Vere, you are a devilish fine fellow—and I am proud of being your second!"

"But you have misunderstood me!" cried Charles: "or else I must be sadly misunderstanding you——"

"Where is the misunderstanding?" asked Egerton, with renewed astonishment. "There is Sir Alexander Holcroft——"

"Ah!" ejaculated our hero, as the true light now burst in upon him. "The misunderstanding exists in this," he at once proceeded to say seriously and impressively,—“that if it be Sir Alexander Holcroft who seeks to provoke me to this duel——"

"Who should it be but Holcroft?" demanded Egerton, almost angrily. "You seemed just now to understand the matter well enough when I told you that there was a lady in the case——"

"Frankly speaking," interrupted Charles, "all my ideas pointed to some one else!"

"Well then, my dear sir," said Egerton curtly, "if you are such a desperate fellow in your love affairs that you incur the risk of having half-a-dozen gentlemen down upon you, it is your business and not mine. The only thing to be said is that you are now meeting one whom you did not expect, instead of another offended party whom you evidently *did* expect."

"Egerton," said De Vere, "your words would be an insult under any other circumstances: but here they are an absolute cruelty! You must not pretend to read what was passing in my mind when just now in the chaise——"

"Mr. De Vere," interrupted Egerton coldly, "do you or do you not mean to afford Sir Alexander Holcroft satisfaction for the offence which you have given him? That is now the only question; and I beg that it may be at once decided."

"I have given Sir Alexander Holcroft no offence," replied our hero firmly; "and before I stand in his presence to risk my own life, or with the chance of taking his——"

"What is the matter, gentlemen?" inquired Mr. Winton, stepping forward; and as he was a middle-aged man, cool, sedate, and deliberate, he thought from appearances that there was a mistake of some kind or another.

"I am called upon," exclaimed De Vere, "to fight with Sir Alexander Holcroft——"

"Hush, my dear friend!" interposed Mr. Egerton, who stood to a nicety upon punctilios in affairs of honour: "it is my province and duty as your second to hear and answer questions."

"Well then, Egerton, what is it?" asked Mr. Winton.

"I am somewhat embarrassed how to reply," said the gentleman appealed to; "for the fact is I thought that my principal Mr. De Vere thoroughly comprehended in the first instance whom he was to encounter here, whereas now it transpires that he expected to meet some one else—and hence the perplexity."

"The whole matter lies in a nutshell," said Mr. Winton. "Sir Alexander Holcroft feels aggrieved on certain points which are so well established by indisputable evidence that Mr. De Vere can have nothing to do but decide whether he will apologize or fight?"

"I cannot apologize," said our hero, "where I utterly deny having given any offence. Perhaps even still more loath were I to stand up in a mortal combat with a man who has no satisfaction to demand of me, and against whom I myself entertain naught but a friendly feeling."

"It seems," said Sir Alexander Holcroft, now stepping forward from the spot where he had lingered at a little distance, "that I must have a few words with Mr. De Vere."

"I really do not think that Winton and myself can permit it," interposed Egerton, who was terribly afraid that matters might be amicably arranged and that he would be hauled of the pleasure of beholding a duel.

"Where lives are at stake, Mr. Egerton," said Winton decisively, "we must not stand upon mere punctilios."

"I will now speak, gentlemen," said Sir Alexander Holcroft, "more in detail than I have previously spoken to you on this subject. There is a certain lady to whom I was showing some little attentions; and it would appear that Mr. De Vere is intimately acquainted with her. Yet though Mr. De Vere and I have two or three times spoken concerning her, he has affected to be altogether unacquainted with her. There was a studied duplicity in this——"

"Rather say, sir," interjected Charles, "that there were motives of exceeding delicacy——"

"Delicacy indeed!" exclaimed the Baronet angrily. "And you heard me almost as good as declare that I should take her as my mistress——while you yourself were carrying on an intrigue with her!"

"I deny it, sir! I utterly deny it!" ejaculated Charles indignantly.

"This is really too much!" exclaimed the Baronet, now becoming excited. "Oh! I know very well, sir, that there is a masculine prudery as well as a feminine one; and you are a proficient in the former. How indignant you pretended to be at the idea of a man endeavouring to palm off his mistress upon another——while you yourself were doubtless inwardly chuckling at the idea that it was your own paramour likewise who was thus being gotten rid of! Or else, perhaps, you were desirous that matters should remain as they were, so that you might continue to enjoy stealthy access to the fair one, under favour of the indifference of her present protector——whereas you might have thought that if she came under my protection it would be different. And then too, to think that I was such a fool as to enter into long arguments and moralise upon subjects with which you perhaps, after all, are much better acquainted than I myself!"

"Sir Alexander Holcroft," said Charles De Vere, the indignant blood flushing his cheeks, "I have listened to you with a constrained patience, because I was desirous to learn the full extent of your misunderstandings and erroneous constructions——"

"By heaven, this is intolerable!" ejaculated the

Baronet, now lashed up into a fury. "Why, sir, the whole tenour of your conduct has been fraught with a duplicity—a hypocrisy—a double-dealing——"

"I deny it," exclaimed De Vere. "Explanation is easy——"

"What, sir, in the face of this?" cried the enraged Baronet, producing a note, which he tossed scornfully to De Vere.

The youth caught it in his hand——opened it——and started when he perceived that it was the identical billet that Floribel had sent to him, and of the loss of which he had remained completely unconscious until the present moment.

"Now, sir," exclaimed the Baronet, "will you deny——"

"Yea—I deny everything that you have said!" responded our hero; "and if you will listen for a moment——"

"My God, he is a coward after all!" ejaculated Sir Alexander. "Perhaps this will raise his mettle!"——and with his open palm he struck our hero upon the face.

The very next instant the Baronet was levelled with the ground; and Charles exclaimed, as he turned away from the opponent whom he had thus smitten to the earth, "Now indeed there is no alternative but that shots should be exchanged!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Egerton, quite cheered by the sudden turn which the aspect of affairs had taken; "this is as it ought to be!"

The Baronet rose slowly from the earth; for he was half stunned by the tremendous blow which our hero had dealt him with his clenched fist: his face was pale with rage——and he muttered to his second, "By heaven, Winton, nothing but that fellow's life-blood shall satisfy me!"

"Be cool, Sir Alexander," whispered the second: "for De Vere is evidently no coward; and I am still almost inclined to think that there must be some mistake——"

"Impossible!" ejaculated the Baronet; "it is all his cursed duplicity. Where are the pistols? Go and settle matters with Egerton."

Having thus spoke, Sir Alexander Holcroft seated himself upon a block of stone; and drawing forth a brandy-flask, he applied it to his lips. Not that he required any stimulant for his courage, because he was as dauntless as man could be: but the brandy had been brought in case of need as a restorative in particular circumstances——and having it thus ready to the hand, he availed himself of the stimulant to revive the energies which had been half paralysed by the blow that levelled him. Meanwhile Charles De Vere, standing at a little distance, was making some additional notes in his pocket-book, briefly allusive to the causes of the duel;——and at the same time the seconds were measuring the ground.

All the preliminaries being now settled, the seconds stationed their principals, to whom they likewise handed the pistols. The signal was given——but only one report was heard. It was Sir Alexander who had fired; and Egerton, who had his eyes riveted upon De Vere, admired immensely the cool courage which he maintained throughout. The bullet whistled harmlessly by Charles's ear; and then he pointed his own weapon straight up into the air and discharged it.

"Why did you do that?" demanded Egerton, rushing towards him.

"Because I did not thirst for his blood," was the answer. "For the blow which he gave me, I had already chastised him. In other respects he is labouring under an egregious mistake on my account; and I did not wish him to fall the victim to an error which is really more or less supported by circumstantial evidence. Let him take another shot if he think fit: but in *that* case I shall not again discharge my weapon up into the air!"

Egerton advanced towards Winton, and inquired what that gentleman now proposed to do on behalf of his principal?

"I should recommend," said Mr. Winton, "that Sir Alexander Holcroft listen to whatever explanation Mr. De Vere may have to give."

"Oh!" exclaimed Egerton, who was anxious to see shots veritably exchanged, "I cannot possibly allow my principal to give any explanations after years has once refused to listen to them."

"But I," said Mr. Winton, "on the score of humanity, appeal earnestly to Sir Alexander and entreatingly to Mr. De Vere——"

"My dear fellow," interposed Egerton; "there is no such thing as humanity where points of honour are concerned."

"I differ from you, sir," rejoined Mr. Winton, coldly and severely; then turning to Sir Alexander, he whispered hastily with him for a few minutes.

"De Vere," said Egerton, speeding towards his own principal, "you will give no explanations?"

"Certainly not at this stage of the proceeding," replied our hero. "Let my antagonist fire again if he think fit."

"Sir Alexander Holcroft is satisfied," exclaimed Mr. Winton, proclaiming the announcement with a real pleasure depicted on his countenance, while Mr. Egerton looked proportionately annoyed that so pleasant a little affair should be thus nipped in the bud.

"In that case," said Charles De Vere, "I can have no hesitation in convincing Sir Alexander Holcroft that he has all along misunderstood and wronged me."

"If you prove that much," said the Baronet, "I shall owe you the amplest apologies!"

"You will not disbelieve, sir," continued our hero, "the words which were written by a man at the moment before he had to stand in the face of a loaded pistol. Read this page of my pocket-book."

Thus speaking, Charles presented the pocket-book to the Baronet, who perused what was written on the page specially indicated. Its contents were as follow (the two first paragraphs, be it understood, having been pencilled in the chaise at a time when Charles imagined that it was Silvio, the guilty Ginevra's lover, whom he was about to meet):—

"TO MY DEAREST MOTHER.—I am unfortunately on the point of being dragged into a duel through circumstances which involve not the slightest fault on my own part, and the particulars of which I have not time to record. If I fall, they will be related to you by others; and heaven grant that they may be truthfully told,

and that their proper interpretation may transpire. God bless you, my dearest mother!

"TO MY BELOVED AGNES.—Should the fatal necessity arise for these lines to be shown to you, believe me, dearest, when I declare that never in thought or deed have I proved faithless to the love which I bear you!

"ADDENDA (*written upon the ground*).—I now find that I had previously misunderstood the cause of the duel to which I am provoked. Dearest mother—and beloved Agnes—those causes are connected with Floribel. Yes, dear Agnes! because in obedience to your wish I sought your erring cousin in the hope of turning her steps into the right path—and because from motives of delicacy I had previously abstained from making the slightest allusion to her—I have entailed upon myself the most outrageous suspicions. I must leave it to Floribel to give you a full and faithful account of everything that passed between herself and me. God bless you both!"

These were the lines which Sir Alexander Holcroft attentively perused, while Winton and Egerton stood at a short distance; for they comprehended that the leaf of the pocket-book was for the Baronet's inspection only.

"One word, Mr. De Vere," said Sir Alexander; and when our hero approached him, he added in a low voice, "I am to understand, therefore, that Floribel is the cousin of the young lady to whom you are engaged?"

Charles replied in the affirmative.

"And this therefore is the reason that she addresses you familiarly by your Christian name in that billet?"

"The reason is as you interpret it," rejoined Charles. "And now, sir, if you will reflect upon everything which has passed between you and me in respect to Mr. Clifford and this erring young lady, you will understand that the feelings which chiefly inspired me at the time, were sorrow, disgust, and indignation, that she by her conduct should have laid herself open to be treated and spoken of with libertine levity, and that others should have thus treated and spoken of her."

"I see it all, De Vere!" exclaimed the Baronet; "and my error has been deplorable. I tender you the amplest apologies! Can you and will you forgive me?"

"Here is my hand, Sir Alexander," replied our hero, as he proffered it.

The Baronet grasped it warmly—while Egerton whispered to Winton, "It is a pity the business ended so soon; for after all, they are two fine fellows to be opposed to each other."

Mr. Winton turned on his heel without making any reply to the observation; and the four gentlemen now proceeded to the hackney-coach which was waiting at the place where it had been left,—the one that brought the Baronet and Winton thither being dismissed. On their way back into Naples, it was agreed that the completest secrecy should be maintained in respect to the affair; and the driver of the hackney-coach was liberally rewarded, or rather bribed, to keep his own counsel.

On reaching the Embassy, Charles De Vere proceeded to his own chamber, where in a few minutes he was joined by Sir Alexander Holcroft.

"My dear friend," said the Baronet,—“for in such a light do I now really consider you after the painful adventures of this day—I wish to consult you, for I feel myself awkwardly situated. I do not pretend to be very straightlaced or particular; but after all that has transpired, I would do nothing that might prove unpleasant or disagreeable towards yourself. In plain terms, I am alluding to Floribel—”

“I think, Sir Alexander,” said Charles gravely, “that I can partially understand what is uppermost in your mind. She told me this afternoon that she was immediately to separate from Mr. Clifford; and from all you had previously said, I judged—But Oh! you know not how painful this subject is for me when I think of her amiable and virtuous cousin!”

“Bear with the topic for a few minutes,” said the Baronet; “and it will end at once and for ever so far as I am concerned. It is true that Floribel consented to place herself under my protection. I called upon her this morning—I made my overtures—and they were accepted. You may therefore imagine the degree of rage which seized upon me when in the gateway of the Embassy I picked up the note which you had evidently by accident let fall. My measures were at once taken; and hence the occurrence which I so deeply deplore. But that is not now the point. How am I to act with regard to Floribel? If I decline fulfilling the promises I have made her, she will be justified in looking upon my conduct as most ungentlemanly and unhandsome: but on the other hand, I feel after all which has this afternoon taken place, that it would be an outrage upon your feelings to become the cause of leading the cousin of your betrothed more deeply into the ways of error.”

“It is impossible for me to offer an opinion upon such a subject,” replied De Vere. “I may sink in your estimation as a man of the world—you may even look upon me as a milkop or a saint, though I can assure you I am neither—but to be candid, the whole matter to which you refer is so profligate that I cannot bear to submit it to the process of deliberate reflection.”

Sir Alexander Holcroft paced the room for a few minutes in bewilderment how to act. He wished to gain possession of a beautiful mistress: but on the other hand he was loath to act ungraciously or ungenerously towards our hero after everything that had occurred. At length suddenly stopping short, he said to Charles, “Tell me frankly, De Vere, would there be any breach of friendship betwixt us if I were to fulfil my promise to Floribel?”

“I have no right to dictate in the matter,” responded our hero; “and therefore I should say nothing on the point, did you not so frankly and generously appeal to me. My answer shall therefore be given with equal frankness. As between two men of the world, we should of course continue on speaking terms if you took Floribel as your mistress. But never,” added Charles emphatically, “could I regard as a friend the man who brought that erring creature one step lower down the ladder which she is so fatally descending!”

“I have asked your decision,” said the Baronet; “and now you shall see how I will act. Have you writing materials? Ah! they are here.”

Seating himself at the table, Sir Alexander penned a letter, which he showed to De Vere, and the contents of which ran as follow:—

“MY DEAR MADAM,

“Circumstances which have suddenly transpired, and over which I have no control, painfully compel me to request that I may be permitted to revoke the promise which I made this morning, and that you will kindly look upon the overture as if it had never been proposed. At the same time believe me when I assure you that I must ever regard you with a sentiment of friendship. You are not happy with Mr. Clifford; and you desire to leave him. In the confidence with which you honoured me, I learnt sufficient to ascertain that you have not funds immediately available at your command. May I therefore, without giving you offence, request you to make use of the enclosed?—and if at any future period I can be of service to you in a similar manner, I trust that you will not hesitate to avail yourself of my friendship.

“I remain, my dear madam,

“Yours very faithfully,

“ALEXANDER HOLCROFT.”

The letter enclosed a cheque upon the Barocet's Neapolitan banker for a sum which in English money may be represented as two thousand guineas. Charles De Vere could not help admiring the pecuniary liberality of Sir Alexander Holcroft; while the whole tenour of his conduct in this concluding scene of the drama was stamped with a generosity all the more remarkable when the general libertinage of his character was taken into account. Charles could not therefore offer a syllable of remonstrance: but on the contrary he expressed his gratitude to the Baronet;—and from that moment a strong friendship existed between them.

The letter, with its valuable enclosure, was duly despatched: but no answer was returned. The Baronet had however taken care that it should be delivered into Floribel's hand unseen by the unprincipled Clifford, for fear lest the latter should endeavour to obtain from her the funds with which she was thus provided. On the following day Sir Alexander ascertained that Floribel had quitted Naples at an early hour the same morning; and Clifford at first thought that she had gone somewhere to place herself under the Baronet's protection. But of this idea Sir Alexander quickly disabused him; and Clifford flippantly exclaimed, “Well, I really fancied you had taken a liking to the girl. But no matter where or with whom she is gone, since she is fairly off my hands!”

He himself shortly afterwards left Naples for the purpose of visiting Paris.

On the day after the duel, Charles De Vere wrote a long letter to Agnes, in which he informed her that Floribel had separated from Mr. Clifford—that it was her intention to remain altogether upon the Continent—to dwell in strict seclusion—and under a feigned name to conceal her identity as the cousin of Agnes Evelyn. Without actually recording the falsehood, Charles so worded his letter that it might impress Agnes with the idea that Floribel meant to pursue a better path, and that it was through contrition she purposed to seek seclusion and to change her name. We may add that



such was the significance which the amiable and beautiful Agnes attached to this epistle from De Vere; and though she was far from being rendered entirely happy on her erring cousin's account, she was at all events much cheered and comforted, and she prayed that the supposed contrition might be complete and permanent.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE BALL AT THE EMBASSY.

THREE or four days elapsed after the duel in the ruins of the Abbey of St. Nicholas, and still Charles De Vere received no communication from Ginevra. During this interval he called again at Nino Corso's lodgings: but he did not on this

occasion behold the tall distinguished-looking man who was constrained by circumstances to hide himself beneath the roof of the same house. Neither did he inquire concerning him; for he thought that it would be wrong to exhibit any curiosity upon the point as to whether he were still there or whether he had sought another asylum. In respect to the continued silence of Ginevra our hero grew uneasy; for he naturally thought that under all circumstances it was her duty to signify with the least possible delay her intentions in reference to her child.

The British Ambassador and his lady were now to give a splendid entertainment, at which all the *elite* of the Neapolitan nobility, as well as the most distinguished foreigners then residing at Naples, were to be present. There was in the first instance a dinner-party, the table being laid for the accommodation of sixty guests; and as

Charles sat next to Sir Alexander Holcroft, the latter interested and amused him with brief *piquant* biographical sketches or anecdotes relative to the principal personages present. At ten o'clock the doors of the saloons were thrown open; and a continuous stream of carriages, rolling up to the gate of the ambassadorial mansion, set down the company. By half-past ten the spacious and magnificent suite of drawing-rooms were filled with handsomely dressed gentlemen and elegantly apparelled ladies,—the golden flood of lustre giving to the entire scene an air of magnificence and grandeur. The diamonds upon the brow and bosom of beauty reflected that lustre with vivid jets of light: the splendid uniforms of military officers were conspicuous amidst the assemblage.

Charles De Vere was standing near a window-recess in company with Sir Alexander Holcroft, who now, as previously at the dinner-table, was pointing out to him the most distinguished personages. The greater portion of the company had already arrived; and dancing soon commenced. As a matter of course the *attachés* were expected to assist the noble host and hostess as much as possible in doing the honours of the mansion; and Holcroft said to Charles, "We must temporarily separate, De Vere, to choose our partners. You are already acquainted with a sufficient number of ladies to enable you to make a good selection for yourself. Hasten then, and let us play our part in giving life to the entertainment."

Charles was soon involved with an agreeable partner in the mazes of the dance—where his handsome person, his elegant figure, the exquisite taste with which he was dressed, as well as his youthfulness, attracted general attention; so that the whisper soon circulated amongst those to whom he was previously unknown that this was the new *attaché* to the British Embassy.

The dance being concluded, Charles, having conducted his partner to her seat, presently rejoined Sir Alexander Holcroft, who was in excellent spirits, and whose conversation sparkled with a liveliness that rendered it even more than usually interesting.

"You see that fat dowager on yonder ottoman?" he whispered to De Vere: "she is a rich old countess—I forget her name at the moment—and having been a desperate *intriguante* in the sphere of love, she is now as deeply plunged in the vortex of politics. That beautiful young creature seated next to her, is her daughter; and although married to a young and handsome man—Ah! by the bye, there is her husband, talking at this very moment to Egerton—it is confidently rumoured and as generally believed that she has already had two lovers. That tall distinguished-looking man in the General's uniform, is the Marquis of Ortona. It is whispered that in his heart he entertains most liberal opinions, and that he would gladly see the Bourbon dynasty deposed from the Neapolitan throne. Indeed, at the beginning of the present year he experienced some little difficulty, if I have been rightly informed, in convincing the Government that he had not been secretly intriguing with certain conspirators. However, he *did* succeed—and there he is in his splendid uniform, and his breast covered with orders."

"I have heard something of that conspiracy to

which you have just alluded," said Charles; "and if I mistake not, several of the most distinguished Neapolitan noblemen were implicated in it?"

"You have been perfectly well informed," answered Holcroft; "for it is very different in this country from what it is in our's. Here, in Italy, many of the nobles are devoted to the popular cause. By the bye, it was a strange thing—but not the less a fact as it transpired—that the contemplated rising of the French Republicans at the beginning of the year against Louis-Philippe, was known to the secret societies of Naples; and the Republicans in this city laid all their plans to make a demonstration against their Government the instant the intelligence should reach them that the people had risen in Paris. But it seems that there was a traitor in the ranks of the Neapolitan liberals; for early in January—and therefore some six or seven weeks before the French Revolution broke out—all the machinations, plans, and hopes of the Neapolitan conspirators were fully betrayed. The result was that some fled in consternation; but the greater portion were captured and thrown into dungeons. It was in this conspiracy of which I am speaking that the Marquis of Ortona was suspected to have been implicated: but he not merely remained to face the storm, but even succeeded in braving it. Less fortunate was another leading personage amongst the conspirators—a certain Count of Camerino, who was compelled to fly precipitately. He is a nobleman of wealth and consequence, and had every reason to enjoy his worldly advantages in peace and tranquillity rather than involve himself in all sorts of troubles by taking part in plots and conspiracies."

"Perhaps he deeply felt the enslaved and degraded position of the Neapolitan people?" observed our hero.

"There can be no doubt that he was sincere as well as enthusiastic in his conduct," rejoined Sir Alexander Holcroft: "but for my part I cannot conceive how a man in his position could run such risks when he had so much to lose personally, and so little to gain."

"Perhaps he is young and ardent——"

"Ardent he may be, and assuredly he is—but young he is not; for his age is midway betwixt forty and fifty. He had not long married a beautiful young creature—he was a widower, by the bye—and this was his second wife——"

"I presume she accompanied him on his flight?" said Charles inquiringly.

"No," rejoined the Baronet: "she remained at Naples; and she used at one time to visit the Embassy—but now that we are speaking of her, I recollect that I have not seen her lately. It is supposed that the Count of Camerino fled to France, and left his young wife behind him that she might become the secret means of communication between himself and his liberal friends in the Neapolitan capital: though I should think that this is scarcely probable—for the Count is a magnanimous-minded man, and would scarcely expose his young wife to the consequences of detection if engaged in such treasonable matters. It is far more probable that his flight took place so precipitately there was no time to make arrangements for the Countess to accompany him; and as it is supposed he went to Paris and the French Revolution broke out

soon afterwards, the unsettled condition of that country may have hitherto prevented him from sending for the Countess to join him in the French capital."

"And were not his estates confiscated?" inquired Charles De Vere.

"It happens," replied Sir Alexander Holcroft, "that though the Count of Camerino is a Neapolitan, nobleman, his principal estates are in Tuscany, and therefore safe from confiscation. He however possesses a handsome house in Naples—where, I believe, his Countess resides. But it suited the King's policy to deal leniently in respect to the leading conspirators and their families—for Naples has ever since been in a ferment, and Sicily, as you know, was in rebellion; so that the King and his Government perhaps deemed it more prudent to leave the unfortunate young Countess in undisputed possession of her home. The Count's son was however compelled to fly—"

"His son?" repeated Charles. "I thought you said that the Count had only recently married—"

"Only recently married his second wife, I told you," responded the Baronet. "He had long been a widower—he had one son by his first marriage—But Ah! dancing is to be renewed. Let us go and choose our partners."

The two friends now again separated; and Charles De Vere was hastening through the splendid saloon towards a group of fair ones at the further extremity, when he stopped suddenly short—for at the moment he beheld a beautifully dressed lady entering the apartment. She was apparelled with mingled taste and elegance: her head-dress of black lace set off the shining glory of her glossy auburn hair—her well-modelled arms were bare to the shoulders—the tight-fitting corsage displayed the symmetry of her shape. There was a colour upon her cheeks,—a colour which Charles more than conjectured arose from a strong inward excitement, as her large blue eyes glanced rapidly round the room. For this was Ginevra—the guilty Ginevra!—the mother of the child so singularly confided to his guardianship—the penitent whom he had seen in the church!

Suddenly smitten with the idea that if he revealed himself too abruptly to her view she might be overcome by her sense of shame, and that her feelings would be betrayed, he stepped aside, half-concealing himself behind a pillar whence he could still keep his eye upon her. The Marquis of Ortona almost immediately hastened to accost Ginevra, to whom he gave his arm; for she had evidently arrived without any male companion—indeed altogether alone. The Marquis escorted her towards the wife of the British Ambassador; and the noble hostess gave her hand in a friendly manner to Ginevra.

"She is, then, after all, a lady of consequence!" thought Charles within himself. "She has evidently come to seek me here: for she knows my name—she knows likewise that I belong to the Embassy. The moment is now approaching when the mystery must be cleared up!"

Having paid her respects to the British Ambassador's wife, Ginevra walked slowly away with her noble companion the Marquis of Ortona; and Charles perceived that she was furtively flinging her glances in all directions.

"She is seeking for me!" he said to himself; and he emerged from his half-concealment behind the stately marble pillar.

In a few moments his eyes encountered the looks of Ginevra: for an instant she became deadly pale—then her entire countenance was suffused with a deep blush—but in another moment her demeanour was collected and composed. She continued to converse gaily—or rather, perhaps, in an assumed tone of gaiety with the Marquis of Ortona, as they both advanced along the same side of the room where Charles was stationed. As they drew near, he wondered within himself whether she would openly recognise him, or what course she would pursue. At all events he was inspired with the generous determination to leave the matter to her own discretion, and not to appear to recognise her unless she herself should give him the first encouragement.

The Marquis and Ginevra advanced slowly, with that fashionable lounging pace which is adopted in ball-rooms; and just as they were passing by our hero, Ginevra darted upon him a significant glance—then her looks were swept around—and the next instant she slipped a billet into his hand. She continued her way, still conversing gaily with her companion; and as the little incident was the work of a single moment, Charles flattered himself that it utterly escaped observation. He remained for a few minutes longer in the room, and then retired to some unoccupied apartment, where he proceeded to open the billet. It contained these words:—

"Generous Englishman, my life's gratitude is your due! Meet me to-morrow, at the hour of noon precisely, at the door of the church where I saw you the other day. As I have hitherto trusted, so I still confidently trust in your honour, your generosity, and your secrecy!

"GINEVRA."

"Then, after all, she *did* know that I was in the church! she did observe me on one of those occasions!" exclaimed Charles within himself. "Perhaps she thinks that I am aware who she is?—at all events she must know that this night I cannot fail to learn her name! She signs with her Christian name only: but this is perhaps a wise precaution—for there may be more than one Ginevra present; and if the billet happened to be lost, it would be impossible to identify the particular Ginevra by whom it was penned. Yes—assuredly to-morrow I will keep this appointment!"

Charles then burnt the billet, and retraced his way to the drawing-rooms. There he was almost immediately joined by Holcroft, who said, "Where have you been dancing, De Vere? I did not see you anywhere in the grand saloon—"

"I stepped out to—to—procure some little refreshment—for I did not feel quite well—"

"And yet the rooms are cool enough," interjected the Baronet: "but there is somewhat too great a profusion of these greenhouse flowers, and the atmosphere is sickly. Ah!" he suddenly ejaculated: "look yonder!"

"What is it?" asked De Vere.

"You see that lady leaning on the arm of the Marquis of Ortona—"

"Yes—I had already noticed her; and in fact I was just on the point of inquiring whether you might happen to know——"

"Know her? Of course I do," responded Sir Alexander. "That is the very lady I was talking about just now—the Countess of Camerino."

"Ah!" and it was with difficulty that our hero could repress a sudden start, or prevent his countenance from betraying the emotion which seized upon him. "Let us step aside: the Countess may think we are talking of her."

"And what pretty woman does not like to be talked about?" inquired the Baronet, laughing, as he passed his arm through that of Charles, while they began to make a promenading circuit of the saloon. "The Countess of Camerino knows full well that if we speak of her, it can only be in reference to her beauty or her misfortunes: for never by her conduct has she afforded the slightest scope for the exercise of scandalous tongues."

"How the world is deceived!" thought Charles within himself: and then, as the whole conversation which he had overheard betwixt Ginevra and Silvio in the church rushed in unto his mind—the entire details seeming to be condensed into a single sentence that might be mentally scanned in a moment—a sickening and even horrible idea struck him; so that he longed to put a certain question—but he dared not, for fear lest it might create a suspicion in the Baronet's mind.

"Is she not exceedingly beautiful?" asked Holcroft. "I had just been paying my respects to her for a moment before you rejoined me. You see the Marquis of Ortona shows her every possible attention. There is the sympathy of the liberal towards the young and unprotected wife of his exiled friend!"

"Did you not tell me," inquired Charles, now mustering all his composure to put the question which a few instants back he was afraid to utter,—"did you not tell me that the Count of Camerino had a son——?"

"Yes—the Viscount Silvio," rejoined the Baronet.

Charles felt a cold shudder creep throughout his entire frame. The mystery was cleared up—and a hideous mystery it was! It was the historical romance of Parisine, so beautifully poetized by Byron, enacted over again;—the young wife had been guilty with the youthful son of her own husband! A deep sense of loathing towards the criminal Ginevra took possession of our hero; and he almost regretted that he should have become an accomplice, though unconsciously at the time, in any circumstances connected with that foul domestic drama. As he slowly paced round the room with Holcroft, he caught sight of Ginevra at a little distance: she was now standing amidst a group of ladies, she herself the most beautiful of them all! But Charles no longer beheld her as one that was beautiful: his looks recoiled from her as if from a snake with a lovely skin. Holcroft was rattling away in his usual style: but Charles heard not a syllable that he said,—until suddenly recollecting that the deep abstraction of his manner might arouse the astonishment of his companion—and then by an effort he fell into the discourse. The music speedily proclaimed the signal for renewed dancing; and the friends again temporarily separated.

Charles was compelled to join in this next dance: but we doubt whether his partner found him a very agreeable companion—for his manner was abstracted and he conversed but little. When the quadrille was over, he glanced around to see if Ginevra was still there: but she had retired in the midst of that dance.

When the entertainment was over (and it was kept up till past three in the morning) Charles retired to his chamber, where it was some time before he could compose himself to slumber: for the clearing-up of the mystery had filled his mind with the most painful sensations. At length sleep closed his eyes: but his dreams were agitated and troubled.

Precisely at the hour of noon, our hero bent his way towards the church where he was to meet Ginevra; and he lingered for a few minutes on the steps of the portico, not knowing precisely from which direction she might come. All of a sudden, as he was looking up and down the street, he felt a hand laid lightly on his arm: he turned and beheld Ginevra. She had just issued from the church; and the idea struck our hero that few stood in need of prayer more than herself!

"Follow me," she said: and hastening down the steps, she glided along the street.

At length she turned into a narrower street, at the extremity whereof there was a small square, which not constituting a thoroughfare, was but little frequented except by the inhabitants going out or in their houses. It was now almost completely deserted, and was thus a convenient spot for an interview of a private nature although it was in the broad daylight. Ginevra stopped; and she was almost immediately joined by our hero, whose countenance was cold and severe.

"Allow me to repeat," began Ginevra, in a low tremulous voice, with downcast eyes and blushing countenance, "the sincere—the imperishable gratitude——"

"Lady," interrupted Charles, "I need not such assurances as these. Tell me, what is to be done with that innocent babe whom I have consigned to the care of poor but worthy people?"

"And the babe is well?" asked the Countess eagerly, with all a mother's anxiety, notwithstanding that the child was the offspring of shame and crime.

"The babe is well, lady," rejoined De Vere: "but you will recollect that I have incurred much risk of being placed in a very false position——"

"I know it—I know it!—my God, I know it!" said Ginevra, weeping. "But something shall at once be done to relieve you from this embarrassment. If I did not communicate with you before, it was that my mind was so distracted—— Indeed when I caught a glimpse of you kneeling in the church the very day after that memorable night, I was for a moment on the point of accosting you—but I had not the courage—my heart failed me—and you went away with the congregation."

Charles was on the very point of stating that it was not so, but that he had lingered in the church and had seen her kneeling at the altar,—when she suddenly said, "Tell me—was it, as I thought at the time, mere accident which took you to that church? or was it——?"

"It was mere accident," replied our hero;

"and not until last evening did I know that you were the Countess of Camerino."

Charles had been speaking coldly and severely; and now Ginevra looked anxiously but searchingly up into his face, as if to ascertain whether he had any suspicion of the full extent of her crime, or whether he merely believed her to have been frail, without knowing who her paramour was.

"You treat me coldly," she said, again bending down her looks, while the tears trickled slowly upon her cheeks; "and it is no wonder! You must have learnt that my husband"—here she gasped for utterance—"has been for nearly a year absent—and yet—Ob, sir! do not overwhelm me with shame! do not, I conjure you, demand a single syllable of explanation from my lips! Tell me only where you have left my child—promise me to keep my secret as I feel convinced that you have already maintained it—and let us separate!"

Charles De Vere had no inclination to rake as it were amidst the feculence of this domestic drama; neither did he wish to reveal himself in the light of having played the eavesdropper and learnt everything which had passed between Ginevra and her guilty paramour Viscount Silvio. He therefore said, "Lady, I seek from your lips no explanations. You can judge for yourself by the reception your ladyship last night experienced at the British Embassy, whether I have respected your secret. I shall continue to respect it. Am I to understand that with the least possible delay I shall find myself relieved from all embarrassment in reference to that babe? It is now in the charge of worthy persons, as I have already informed you. The man's name is Nino Corso; and he is the driver of a public vehicle. His address is No. 27, in the Via Graciosa. He and his wife are anxious to keep the child——"

"Heaven be thanked!" murmured Ginevra: "to their care will I leave the poor innocent! This very day shall these worthy people receive an intimation to the effect that they are no longer to look to you as one accountable for the maintenance of that babe."

"It is enough, lady," said Charles: "I ask no more. I rely upon your word that this shall be done—because under existing circumstances I shall not again visit Nino Corso's dwelling."

"Before we separate," said the Countess of Camerino, in a voice full of emotion, and with the tears streaming down her cheeks, "suffer me to renew the expressions of that heartfelt gratitude which never can be diminished! Your conduct has been noble and magnanimous throughout;—and not the least generous portion of it is your present abstention from demanding explanations at my lips. May heaven bless you!"

Ginevra proffered her hand. She was weeping—her bosom was convulsed with her emotions—it was a spectacle which melted the generous heart of the youth, who moreover remembered at the instant how bitter was the remorse which the unhappy Countess had displayed on the two occasions he had seen her in the church. He therefore accepted her hand; and exclaiming, "May God give you strength to continue henceforth in the right path!" he hurried away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WARDROBE.

THE scene now changes to the lodgings of Nino Corso in Graciosa Street. It was about nine o'clock in the evening of the day of which we have been writing. Nino had just returned home from his work, and had sat down to supper, while Benedetta doled in her arms the child which had been consigned to her keeping. Presently there was a tap at the door: Nino sprang from his seat to answer the summons, for he suspected who the visitor was; and he introduced the tall middle-aged personage of whom we have previously spoken.

"We are all alone, my lord," said Nino, bowing with the deepest respect. "Pray walk in."

The nobleman—for such appeared to be his rank, notwithstanding the assurance which Corso had given Charles that he was a merchant who had failed—was enveloped in his capacious mantle, which he no doubt wore to conceal his countenance in case any stranger should ascend the stairs at the moment when he traversed the landing. He entered the room and sat down.

"We have not seen your lordship all day till now," said Benedetta.

"I have been engaged in writing many letters," replied the nobleman, "which Corso must have the goodness to deliver carefully to-morrow."

Benedetta looked distressed: Corso made her a significant gesture as if to bid her avoid displaying any such emotion in the presence of their distinguished guest. But the keen eye of the nobleman caught both the afflicted look and the signal that was meant to repress it; and he hastened to exclaim, "Fear not, Benedetta, that your husband shall be compromised on my account. Not for worlds would I bring trouble down upon the heads of yourselves or your family! Nino will exercise the utmost circumspection in delivering the letters; and as they all are addressed to discreet and trustworthy persons, there is no danger to be apprehended. It is absolutely necessary that I should at length communicate with my friends. Here have I been ten whole days in Naples, hesitating and deliberating—undecided what steps to take—playing indeed a child's part—having had the courage to come hither, and then feeling as if my energies were suddenly paralysed! Corso is a worthy patriot——"

"Oh, my lord!" exclaimed Benedetta, "you know I am agreeable that my husband should do anything for you: but ever since he ran such a fearful risk of being arrested, and perhaps sent to the gibbet"—here the woman shuddered visibly—"at the beginning of the year, when the conspiracy exploded, he has sworn to me that he will henceforth consider his poor little children as having paramount claims upon him."

"Rest assured, Benedetta," answered the nobleman, "that Corso will now incur no risk of any kind. I have already pledged myself to you both that I am not now in Naples for the purpose of organizing any fresh attempt against the Government. I know that it would not succeed: I know the king, backed by thousands of a cut-throat soldiery, is for the time all powerful. But in respect

to the affairs of Rome it is vitally important that the leaders of Italian patriotism should be in possession of certain important facts which have come to my knowledge in Paris. For this reason I am now here; and when my mission is accomplished in Naples, I shall proceed stealthily to Rome itself. Now, Benedetta, are you reassured?"

"Perfectly so, my lord," answered Corso's wife, her countenance brightening up.

"Thanks to your arrangements and attentions, my good friends," continued the nobleman, "my presence in Naples is evidently unsuspected by the police-authorities. And you are convinced—are you not? that the porter of this house is completely trustworthy?"

"I would stake my existence on it, my lord," replied Nino Corso. "He belonged to the same section of the secret society as I myself did last year——"

"'Tis enough!" said the nobleman: "he is evidently trustworthy. And that young Englishman who surprised me here the other day——"

"He has honestly written upon his countenance," exclaimed Benedetta. "I told your lordship who he was——"

"And I am convinced he is a good and generous-hearted young man," chimed in Nino Corso. "Besides, he suspects nothing: for I assured him that your lordship was a merchant who had experienced misfortunes—and he expressed the utmost sympathy."

"And think you, my friends, that in a suitable disguise," continued the nobleman,—"say for instance in that of a priest—I might venture to travel through the Neapolitan kingdom into the Roman States?"

"Assuredly, my lord," answered Corso, "provided you adopt the various precautions of which we were speaking a day or two ago. You yourself can scarcely know even when you look in the mirror, how different your countenance appears with the whickers, beard, and moustache shaven off; and if you cut your hair close—wear the green spectacles—and assume the garb of a priest, you might pass through a crowd of even your most intimate friends without standing the least chance of being recognised."

"'Tis well," again said the nobleman: "for though in the cause of patriotism I would dare any risk, yet there are considerations——"

"Yes, my lord," said Benedetta, "there are indeed considerations wherefore you should study your safety:—then after a little hesitation, she inquired, "Does not your lordship purpose to suffer her ladyship to know that you are in Naples?"

"No—assuredly not!" rejoined the nobleman. "There are a thousand reasons against such a course. In the first place, my wife loves me sincerely—and she would not rest until she flew hither to embrace me. Who can tell how her movements may be watched by the spies of the police? And if I were to suffer her to know that I am here, but to forbid her to come to throw herself into my arms, she would be distressed and excited—she might inadvertently betray her feelings—in short, it would be most dangerous to permit her to come hither, and a needless cruelty to acquaint her with my presence in Naples and at the same time prohibit her from coming."

"True, my lord," said Benedetta. "And yet it does seem singular that one should be in the same city as one's own wife——"

The nobleman's lip quivered with emotion for an instant; and then he said, "Wife, home, and everything must be sacrificed to one's love of country!"

"Where is your lordship's son at present?" inquired Benedetta hastily: for she was afraid that this last speech on the part of the nobleman might produce its effect upon her husband Nino, who until within the last eleven or twelve months was wont to be deep in all Neapolitan conspiracies.

"On the memorable night of the 5th of January, when everything was betrayed to the Government by some treacherous spy," answered the nobleman, "and when a hasty warning was conveyed to me that danger was imminent, I and my son fled in different disguises as well as in different directions. To be brief, I went to Paris, and he into Austria. As you may suppose, our correspondence has not since then been very frequent; for the unsettled state of the Continent has absorbed the time of active men and left them little leisure to write mere letters of friendship or of love. But when last I heard from my son, he was in Vienna, dwelling in quietude and obscurity."

"Hark!" said Nino Corso: "methinks I heard a footstep upon the stair!"

The nobleman instantaneously rose from his seat; and catching up his cloak, he strode across the room towards a high piece of furniture—a sort of bureau or wardrobe, which opened with folding-doors, and which was large enough to enable him to stand upright within. But there was no necessity for his lordship to avail himself of it on the present occasion; for it was a false alarm on Nino's part.

"I am nevertheless glad," observed Benedetta, as the nobleman resumed his seat, "that Nino bought that piece of furniture two or three days ago for the special purpose for which it is designed: because after the way in which the young Englishman entered the room so abruptly a week back, it was really dangerous——"

"Hush!" said Corso; "now indeed there is a footstep!"

Almost in the twinkling of an eye the nobleman passed into the wardrobe, and closed the door behind him. All was then silent in the room for a few moments, until it was broken by a gentle tap at the door of the apartment itself. Nino rose to open it; and a female figure, enveloped in an ample cloak, and closely veiled, appeared outside upon the landing.

"Is this the abode," she inquired, in a low and scarcely audible voice, "of Nino Corso, the driver of a public vehicle?"

"It is, Signora," was the man's response; "and I am Nino Corso."

The veiled female at once entered; and on beholding the child in Benedetta's lap, every other feeling and consideration became absorbed in the fondness of a mother; so that scatching up the infant she pressed it to her bosom, all cloaked and veiled as she still remained. Nino Corso had closed the door; and he and his wife looked on with melting hearts, for they comprehended that this must be the mother of the child—though

very far were they from suspecting who the lady herself was. Indeed we may observe that the worthy couple had never to their knowledge seen the Countess of Camerino.

The child, awakened from its slumbers, began to cry; and Ginevra gave the infant back to Benedetta's arms. She then sank upon a seat, overpowered by her feelings; and for some minutes she wept and sobbed as if her heart must break. At length she faltered forth, "I need scarcely tell you, my friends, that I hold towards that poor babe the same position which you"—now specially addressing herself to Benedetta—"doubtless hold towards those sleeping children in that bed. I am the babe's mother."

There was a silence of nearly a minute; and then Ginevra went on to say, "But I have not come to take the child from you. On the contrary, if you will consent to keep it, as I have been led to believe you will——"

"Oh, yes, Signora!" exclaimed Benedetta: "we will assuredly keep the child—for we already love it dearly. And our own little ones love it——"

"Then you shall keep the innocent, my good friends," answered Ginevra; "and you shall bring it up as one of your own. It were useless to attempt to deceive you: all circumstances must from the very first have made you aware that the babe, though very dearly loved by me, its mother, constitutes its mother's shame!"

"We ask no questions, Signora—and we seek no explanations," replied Benedetta. "It is sufficient for us that you decide upon leaving the child in our keeping; and by the holy Virgin! we pledge ourselves to rear the innocent with as much fondness as if it were our own."

"I am sure you will," answered Ginevra, in a voice that was scarcely articulate through the strong emotions that awayed her. "He who confided the babe to your keeping, spoke in the highest terms of you both. But him you will see no more; and therefore have I come to make such arrangements as shall be satisfactory to you. Here is a sum of money; and every six months a similar sum shall be transmitted to you. A provision shall likewise be made by some means or another, for the continued payment of such a sum, even though death shall snatch me away. On this head be not uneasy! Not for worlds," added Ginevra emphatically, "would I completely abandon my poor child—for heaven knows that even as it is the abandonment is only too great!"

She again wept bitterly: but all this time she kept her veil so closely drawn and so thickly folded over her countenance, that neither Nino nor Benedetta could obtain the slightest glimpse of her features. Presently she rose to depart; and again taking the child in her arms, and turning her back upon the worthy couple, she just sufficiently raised the veil to enable her to imprint numerous kisses on the infant's cheeks. Then, with that veil carefully replaced, she restored the child to Benedetta,—to whom in a broken voice she whispered some few parting instructions; and she hurriedly issued from the room. We may add that the sum which she had left behind her, was a very liberal one; and thus the worthy couple had every reason to be gratified with the result of the visit.

The door of the bureau now opened, and the nobleman came forth: but he was pale as death, and he staggered as if intoxicated or about to sink down in a swoon.

"Blessed Virgin! my lord, you are ill!" exclaimed Corso, springing forward to sustain the nobleman. "Indeed the heat must have been suffocating in that place!"

"Enough to stifle his lordship!" added Benedetta. "And to think that his lordship should have been pent up there for a whole half-hour!"

"It is nothing, my friends—nothing," gasped the nobleman: "I shall be better in a few minutes—I am already better now—I will seek my own room."

"Stop, my lord, for an instant," exclaimed Corso, "till I see that the coast is clear."

But the nobleman did not hear him, or at all events did not heed him; for with his cloak upon his arm, he strode, or rather reeled across the landing—entered his own chamber—and drew the door behind him. Fortunately, however, there was no one near to observe this incautious removal from one room to the other: and Corso returned to his own chamber, saying to Benedetta, "If the lady had stayed but a few minutes longer, I am certain his lordship would have been suffocated."

Four-and-twenty hours passed; and it was in the evening of the day following the incidents which we have just related, that a tall man, enveloped in a cloak, entered the gateway of the house No. 27 in the Via Graciosa; and after exchanging a few words with the porter, rapidly ascended the staircase. On reaching the uppermost landing, he knocked in a peculiar manner at the door of the room occupied by the nobleman. The nobleman himself appeared upon the threshold; and the visitor entered. Dropping his cloak, he revealed the countenance of General the Marquis Ortona.

The two political friends embraced; and when they sat down, the Marquis of Ortona was shocked to behold how haggard, how careworn, and how was-begone was the other's countenance.

"Good heaven, my dear Count! you have been very, very ill!" exclaimed the Marquis, with a look and tone of the deepest concern.

"No—I have not been ill, my dear friend—but of course much vexed, and agitated, and excited——"

"Doubtless!" said the Marquis. "But do you think it prudent to run this risk——"

"Not prudent, but imperative," rejoined the Count. "The affairs of Rome demand all the care and anxiety of Italian patriots; for it is now through the Roman republicans only that Italy can hope to obtain her freedom. But of that anon. Tell me, my dear Marquis—how—how—farea it with—with—Ginevra?"

"Her ladyship is well," replied the Marquis, "though she has suffered much of late. Indeed, for a time she altogether secluded herself——"

"Ah! she secluded herself?"—and the Count spoke as if the words were hot cinders sticking in his throat one by one as they came up, and parching his tongue as they passed over it.

"Yes—but can you wonder? However," ejaculated the Marquis, "the Countess is now better; and the night before last she was at a grand ball at the British Ambassador's mansion."

"Ah! at the British Ambassador's mansion?"

said the Count. "By the way, give me the names, if you can, of the attachés and secretaries of that Ambassador? I want them for certain political reasons."

"There is Mr. Winton," replied the Marquis of Ortona, speaking slowly as he successively recalled the names to his memory: "there is Sir Alexander Holcroft—there is Mr. Egerton—and there is Mr. De Vere."

"Enough!" said the Count: and then, with a strange abruptness he observed, "And so Ginevra secluded herself for awhile?"

"Yes—but you need no longer be anxious on her account," replied the Marquis; "for I tell you that——"

"Nevertheless," interrupted the nobleman, "everything which relates to her——"

"Is of course interesting," added the Marquis; "and since I see by the letter you sent me to-day, that your presence is to remain altogether a secret from the Countess, you wish to learn how she has borne this long separation?"

"Precisely so," gasped the Count of Camerino: for the reader must have by this time discovered who the nobleman was.

"At first," resumed the Marquis of Ortona, "your amiable Countess bore up well and courageously against the calamity which separated you from her: but after awhile—it was perhaps three or four months back—she could not endure the gloomy solitude of her palatial home, and she accordingly went to reside with her uncle and aunt——"

"Signor and Signora Visso," interjected the Count, with a degree of bitterness which at once struck the Marquis, who nevertheless put his own construction upon the incident.

"Do not be angry with the Countess, my dear friend," said Ortona. "It is true that her uncle and aunt are comparatively poor and obscure: but it is not for you who entertain such liberal political sentiments, to despise your wife's family because it is a plebeian one. From all I have heard, Signor Visso her uncle is a respectable medical practitioner——"

"Well, well," interjected the Count, "I ought not to be angry. At the same time I cannot forget that when struck by the beauty of Ginevra, I offered her my hand, it was thoroughly understood between us——"

"I know all that you are going to say!" exclaimed the Marquis. "You espoused her on the condition that she would break off all intercourse with her relations? And she doubtless promised you. But she did not foresee that you would so soon be compelled to fly from the country, and that she should be left alone in that large mansion, with no one but her domestics to speak to. Really, my dear Count, you must be reasonable—and you must admit that if the Countess went to sojourn a few weeks at the dwelling of her relatives, it was natural—it was venial——"

"Yes, yes—I will be reasonable," said Camerino: and then he curtly added, "Let us therefore drop the subject. Have you any news?"

"I have something to tell you, my dear friend," responded the Marquis, "which may both surprise and afford you pleasure. Your son the Viscount is in Naples."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Camerino. "This is in-

deed a surprise and a pleasure! But yet the danger which he runs——"

"Rest assured that he is taking proper precautions," said the Marquis.

"And how long has he been in Naples?" inquired the Count.

"I only met him last evening," rejoined the Marquis; "and he told me that he had arrived but a few hours back. He was coming to seek me at my own house. He said that he was uneasy at not having recently heard from you—and he thought that if any one could afford him any intelligence concerning you, it would be I as your most intimate friend—for he dared not present himself at the mansion nor seek the Countess——"

"Do you know where he is to be found?" demanded Camerino abruptly.

"Yes—he gave me his address. He is living at a secluded villa in the suburb."

"Haste, then, my dear friend," said the Count, "and bid him come to me. I long to behold him—to embrace him! But go, Ortona! and let him come to me at once! As for the intelligence which I have to impart in respect to Roman affairs, I will communicate it to-morrow evening, when you must return to me."

The Marquis of Ortona resumed his capacious mantle, and bade his friend a temporary farewell. He then took his departure; and entering the hackney-carriage which had brought him thither, he proceeded without delay to the suburban villa where the Viscount Silvio was lodging. The guilty Silvio was at first seized with a species of consternation on learning that his father was in Naples; but he quickly gathered sufficient from the discourse of the Marquis to reassure him.

"Your father is here for political purposes—be does not mean to see his wife—he is satisfied with the affectionate inquiries he has made concerning her and the assurances I have given him. But he is anxious to embrace you. Doubtless he feels that the momentous secret of his presence in Naples may be better entrusted to a young man who has gathered caution from past experience, than to a young lady whose agitated and excited feelings would almost immediately betray themselves."

Silvio, completely reassured by what he thus heard, muffled himself in his cloak, and set off without delay to the Via Graciosa. On arriving at the house, he whispered a certain password (with which the Marquis had supplied him) to the old porter at the entrance; and he then ascended the stairs to the uppermost landing. Then in a few moments Silvio was clasped in the arms of the father whom he had so cruelly outraged, but who was unconscious that he had been thus foully wronged by his own well-beloved son.

"Silvio! dearest Silvio!" murmured the Count, who, notwithstanding the self-sacrifices he made in his devoted patriotism, was really a man of strong domestic affections.

"Father! dearest father!" exclaimed the Viscount, now experiencing all the horrors and tortures of remorse as he was clasped in the arms of his outraged but unsuspecting sire.

"Sit down, Silvio—sit down, my son," said the Count; "I have things of importance——"

"Good heavens, father," cried the Viscount, "how ill you look!"



"Ill, Silvio?" said the nobleman, his voice now suddenly becoming bitter in its accents: "yes—doubtless I look ill. Yesterday I was quite well—my countenance was not haggard, nor careworn, nor woe-begone: but last evening——"

"Holy Virgin! my dear father, what has happened?" exclaimed Silvio: "what dangers—or perils——"

"No dangers nor perils, Silvio," responded the Count of Camerino; "but——Oh! how can I tell you, Silvio? how can I proclaim the infamy?" cried the unhappy nobleman, starting up from the chair which he had taken.

A terrible uneasiness now possessed the young Viscount: for though he saw that he himself was not suspected, yet he knew not what clue his father might have obtained to Ginevra's guilt, nor how the following-up of that clue might lead to a total unravelment of the whole hideous mystery.

No. 32.—AGNES.

The youthful nobleman said nothing; but he gazed with consternation upon his sire:—for to what other subject could the Count be possibly alluding, if not to that which was uppermost in the criminal Silvio's thoughts?

"My dear son," continued the Count, his features expressing the mingled shame, loathing, and rage with which he drew nearer and nearer towards the dreadful topic,— "your father has been dishonoured! Yes, I—your parent—have sustained an irreparable injury——"

Some ejaculation hovered upon the young Viscount's lips: but the father heard it not; and he went on to say, "Yes, Silvio—the injury I have sustained is signal and immense—and blood only can wash away the stain! In a word, my wife—Ginevra—whom I loved—whom I raised from a humble position to be the partner of my rank and fortune—Ginevra has dishonoured me!" added

the Count in a hoarse voice, and his lips quivered as he strove to keep back the sob that was inwardly convulsing him.

All of a sudden a remarkable degree of coolness and self-possession succeeded the terror and consternation which but a moment back had paralysed the energies of Silvio. He saw that he was standing upon the edge of a precipice, and that if he meant to save himself he must be armed with all possible calmness, fortitude, and resources. Thus while now maintaining a perfect command over his features, he threw into them an expression of indignation and astonishment; and in a kindred tone he ejaculated, "Is this true, father?—have you the proofs? have you acquired the certainty?"

"There is no possibility of doubt, Silvio!" interrupted the Count. "Oh! it is a shocking thing for a husband to have to speak of the shame of his wife! Yet it must be!—and I must triumph over this weakness, for energy is now required at my hands! I tell you, Silvio, that she who bears the name of the Countess of Camerino has dishonoured that name! From her own lips did I ere now——"

"Ah! then you have seen her?" quickly ejaculated Silvio, for an instant thrown off his guard; but the next moment regaining his self-possession, he added, "I thought I understood differently from the Marquis of Ortona?"

"I was in the opposite room," responded the Count,—"it is tenanted by faithful friends—a footstep was heard approaching—and I hid myself. Ah! little thought I who was about to enter! It was Ginevra! Yes, Silvio—the proof of her shame is there—the child that she has borne——"

"The child?" echoed Silvio, unable to repress a shudder; for he felt as if the ground were slipping away from his feet on the edge of the precipice where he was standing.

"Yes, the child," continued the Count of Camerino, with ghastly face, corrugating brow, and clenching hands,—"the child which she has borne to her paramour—a young Englishman——"

"Ah! an Englishman?" ejaculated Silvio. "But who is he, father?"

"Yes—the child is there!" continued the Count, pursuing the strain of his own dreadful thoughts: "the evidence of her guilt—the proof of her frailty!—and I who for the last ten or twelve days have constantly seen the babe—have even fondled it! O God! it is enough to drive one mad!"

"And her child is there?" said Silvio: "and she came to see it? and you heard her speak, father?"

"Yes," answered the Count, in a gloomy sombre tone: "I heard her speak—I heard her confess her shame—I heard her make arrangements with those people for the care of her child! Oh, how was it that I restrained myself from rushing forth from my hiding-place, stretching the vile woman dead at my feet, and throttling the child as one would strangle a loathsome reptile? All the lightnings of heaven appeared to be circulating in my veins—and yet I exercised some power over myself——"

"Alas, my poor father! all this is very, very shocking!" said Silvio, affecting a tone of the deepest sympathy. "But what would you have me do?"

"Ah! that question reminds me of what my duty is—of what my vengeance must be—now how I must be firm and self-possessed throughout this terrible ordeal! Go, my son, under the cover of the darkness of this evening to the British Embassy—inquire for the junior attaché Charles De Vere—entice him hither on some pretext—tell him that you are a messenger from Ginevra—tell him anything you think fit!—but go and bring him hither, that I may immolate him to my vengeance! Do this—and afterwards I will tell you how the guilty Ginevra shall be dealt with!"

"I go, father!" responded the young Viscount! and enveloping himself in his cloak, he was moving towards the door, when as if bethinking himself of something, he turned and said, "Perhaps I may not find him at the Embassy this evening? perhaps I may have to wait until the morrow?—and you know, my dear father, that it is dangerous for me to walk about in the daylight——"

"True, my dear son!" exclaimed the Count: "by all means use every possible precaution! If you return not again to-night, I shall understand that you have failed to fall in with the guilty De Vere. Then let it be for to-morrow night—though vengeance is terribly impatient——"

"Yet must you restrain this impatience somewhat, father," rejoined Silvio; "for the safety of both of us requires it! Leave everything to me—and if you see me not again to-night, rest assured that to-morrow evening I shall be here and that your vengeance shall be gratified!"

Having thus spoken, the Viscount Silvio Camerino quitted the house, closely muffled in his mantle, and entering the hackney-coach which had brought him thither, he returned to his own lodgings in a state of mind that can perhaps be better conceived than described.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE RUINS OF SAINT NICHOLAS.

THE reader will remember the scene at the confessional which occurred about ten days previous to the date of which we are now writing. On that occasion Silvio was stricken with dismay on learning that Ginevra intended to confide her fault to Father Falcinara: but finding that she was resolutely bent on executing her purpose, he could not refuse to proceed to the vestry and deliver to that priest the message with which she had charged him. But on entering the vestry, he found no one there. Then it was that a sudden idea struck him. Hastily assuming a cowl which was hanging to a peg in the vestry, he muffled himself in that Dominican garb, and he proceeded to the confessional. He had now several objects in view. He wished to ascertain where the child had been placed; for he dreaded lest the instinct of maternal fondness should lead Ginevra into indiscretions and imprudences with regard to that infant, which would tend to the betrayal of the terrible secret and bring about a complete exposure. It was therefore his purpose to make away with that child, and thus destroy the proof of Ginevra's frailty. He was also

anxious to discover Ginevra's precise frame of mind in respect to her crime; for he had fancied that she might have possibly concealed much of her real feelings from his knowledge since she had learnt to look upon him with doubt and suspicion. For Silvio dreaded lest Ginevra should in her despair, or else with the idea of making an atonement for her sin, confess everything to her injured husband in a penitentially written letter, and then retire altogether from the world into the seclusion of a convent. Silvio likewise adopted that stratagem in reference to the confessional in order to prevent the fearful secret from being revealed to Father Falconara, lest the holy priest should enjoin the avowal of the crime to the outraged Count as the means of disburdening the wretched young lady's conscience.

With all these aims in view, Silvio had sought the confessional; and with his countenance completely concealed by the muffling hood of the Dominican dress, he had listened to Ginevra's penitential outpourings. She confessed the full extent of her iniquity, reproaching herself however far more than she reproached her guilty paramour: but she did not state where nor how the child had been disposed of. In a low feigned voice—for Silvio was acquainted with Father Falconara and could imitate his voice—he questioned her; but as she became overwhelmed with grief, she heard him not—and he subsequently feared to repeat or press that question lest her suspicions should be excited. It then only became necessary for him to speak in monosyllables in answer to certain questions which she herself put. Should she confess everything to her outraged husband? No. Would there be safety for her soul's welfare if she maintained the secret and welcomed him on his return (whenever this might happen) as if she had never proved faithless to her marriage vows? Yes. Should she retire to a convent on some pretext? No. Might she expect absolution? Yes. Was she to attend the confessional often, and repeat the tale of her iniquity as a means of self-punishment? No. Was she thenceforth to remain altogether silent upon the subject? Yes. Might she approach the holy altar with a sense of absolution from her sins? Yes. Numerous other questions did she put, and to all of them did Silvio give the answers which suited his own purpose. He left her weeping and praying; and returning to the vestry, he laid aside the cowl which had so materially aided his purposes. He went forth from the church, considerably relieved. He felt convinced that the tremendous secret was now altogether safe, and that Ginevra would study her utmost to maintain it. There was only one point in which he had failed of success; and this was to discover to whose hands the infant had been consigned. Persevering as well as utterly unprincipled, he was resolved, if possible, to fathom this mystery; and it was for that purpose he had remained in Naples instead of fulfilling his pledge to Ginevra and returning at once to Vienna. Her uncle and aunt, Signor and Signora Visso, were the mercenary creatures whom his gold had bought over entirely to his own interests: he kept back no secrets from their knowledge—and he desired them to do their best to discover where the child was. Then, after the lapse of a few days, he was anxious to learn some tidings in respect to his father—and

he conceived that the Marquis of Ortona could afford him this intelligence: for he dreaded lest the Count of Camerino should take it into his head to come secretly to Naples before Ginevra's mind had sufficiently recovered from its recent shocks to be enabled to pass through the ordeal of a meeting without betraying herself to her husband. Silvio had therefore sought the Marquis of Ortona, and had falsely assured him that he had only been a few hours in Naples.

All the explanations which we have just given were necessary to fill up certain gaps in our narrative. We may now resume the thread of our story.

Silvio, after leaving his outraged but unsuspecting father, returned to his own lodgings to reflect upon the course which must now be pursued. Not for a moment could he think of fulfilling his sire's instructions and enticing Charles De Vere to the house in the Via Graciosa: for he saw only too plainly that the first word of accusation levelled against our hero would elicit assurances completely exculpating him. Indeed Silvio knew, from certain inquiries which Signora Visso had made, that Charles De Vere had barely been a month in Naples, and that therefore the supposed intrigue with Ginevra could be unmistakably refuted. But what was to be done? Silvio, as we have already said, saw that he was standing upon the verge of a precipice, down which the least touch or the slightest false step would plunge him. In a pecuniary sense he was entirely dependent upon his father: there was no entail in respect to the family estates—no law of primogeniture to render them Silvio's inalienable heritage. If, therefore, his crime were discovered, he would be for ever discarded by his outraged sire—he would become a beggar and a wanderer on the face of the earth! The young Viscount's position was thus frightfully perilous, and he saw the necessity of plunging still more deeply into crime, in order to save himself from detection and exposure in reference to the misdeeds already committed. Before he sought his couch that night he had settled certain plans in his mind; and these, as the reader may imagine, were of the blackest iniquity.

In the forenoon of the following day, Silvio, closely muffled in his mantle, proceeded to the church which Ginevra was in the habit of frequenting and where he hoped now to find her. She was there, kneeling in the midst of the congregation. He waited until the ceremony had concluded,—remaining the while concealed from her view; and then, as she was about to issue forth, he accosted her.

"One word, Ginevra!" he said: "it is of paramount importance that I should speak to you!"

She accompanied him into the seclusion of one of the aisles; and in a low but reproachful tone, the young Countess said, "Is this the way that you keep your promise, Silvio? Ten days back did you pledge yourself that within the hour that was then passing you would quit Naples and set out for Vienna!"

"And I should have kept that pledge," replied Silvio; "but I was seized with illness—I have been confined to my bed. Look how pale and altered I am!"

This was indeed true; for the Viscount had

passed a night of mental anguish and of distracting emotions which gave him the appearance of one who had just risen from a bed of sickness. As Ginevra gazed upon his countenance, her own features expressed a look of sympathy, which was even deepening into tenderness, when suddenly exercising a powerful effort over herself, she said coldly, "And now, Silvio, why do you seek me?—what matter of importance have you to communicate?"

"Prepare yourself, Ginevra, for an announcement that may give you a cruel shock—arm yourself with all your fortitude—nerve yourself, I implore——"

"For mercy's sake speak!" said the unhappy lady, becoming as pale as death and trembling all over.

"My father—your husband—the Count——"

"Merciful heaven! what of him?"—and Ginevra clasped her hands in an agony of suspense and entreaty.

"Prepare yourself, I say," continued Silvio: "your husband is in Naples—and—and—his suspicions are aroused——"

A shriek was about to peal from Ginevra's lips: Silvio saw that it was so, and he caught her forcibly by the wrist, saying in a deep earnest voice, "For God's sake be silent!"

Ginevra looked up at him with the vacancy of despair; and she leant against a pillar for support.

"Yes," continued Silvio, "it is as I tell you! We stand upon the brink of a precipice—but yet we may be saved! There is a mine under our feet—and yet I can prevent it from exploding! Tell me, Ginevra—do you wish that our secret should be kept? or will you be exposed to the world?"

"I would perish sooner!" she emphatically answered. "But what can you do, Silvio?—how can you avert this threatening storm? Oh, heaven have mercy upon me!"

"I have seen my father—I have ascertained how his suspicions have been excited—I know how they may be set at rest! Do not question me upon these points—we have no time to lose in useless discourse—we must act immediately and energetically! Will you confide everything to my management?"

"I will, I will, Silvio!" responded the agonized, almost despairing Ginevra. "Tell me what I can do!—ask me anything except to plunge myself still deeper into iniquity!"

"It is absolutely needful I should see that young Englishman, Charles De Vere——"

"Ah! then you know——"

"No matter what I know," continued the Viscount, with hurried utterance: "do not stop to question me! I tell you I must see this young Englishman—he alone can save us—and he will do it! I cannot seek him at the English Embassy—it is for you to write to him—do this at once—implore him to meet you this evening at sunset, in some convenient spot——"

"And what am I to say to him when we meet?" asked Ginevra, orally bewildered.

"Oh!" ejaculated the Viscount impatiently, "you do not understand me! It is not you that will keep the appointment: it is I! Yes, I will see him—for I know what to say—I know how to act! You have promised to leave everything to my discretion——"

"And I will do so, Silvio!—for on whom can I rely in the whole world?"—and the unfortunate lady's countenance wore an expression of indescribable anguish, while she literally shivered with the violence of her excruciating emotions. "Only swear one thing—for I see that you know all,—swear, Silvio, I solemnly adjure you, that our babe shall be safe!"

"I swear, Ginevra," answered Silvio. "You wronged me the other day——But no matter! I am now acting for both our interests! Hasten and write this billet to Charles De Vere——Ah! but the place of appointment—where shall it be? I recollect a convenient spot!—the ruins of St. Nicholas! Yes, that will do!—and remember, Ginevra, the appointment must be for sunset this evening! Then to-morrow I will meet you here again. And now hasten home and despatch the billet to De Vere."

Ginevra and Silvio separated—the former returning to her own mansion in a state of mind bordering on distraction—the latter bending his way towards the house of Signor Visco. This person, as the reader is already aware, was a surgeon; and though outwardly maintaining a character for respectability, he was in reality unprincipled, mercenary, and selfish. In him therefore the young Viscount found a ready assistant in all his designs; and Visco on the present occasion promised to succour Silvio's views in the way which he pointed out.

The last beams of the setting sun were playing upon the Bay of Naples, tipping with gold the pinnacles of the city itself, and casting their flickering light upon the elopes of Vesuvius, when Charles De Vere approached the ruins of St. Nicholas. He had received a billet from Ginevra, earnestly imploring that he would meet her at this hour and at that place, as she had something of the utmost importance to communicate. The youth knew her handwriting from the circumstance of having received the billet which she had slipped into his hand on the night of the grand entertainment at the British Embassy; and therefore he had no suspicion of any sinister design. He did not however much like the idea of again meeting the guilty Countess of Camerino, towards whom he experienced a feeling of loathing and disgust: but as he had hitherto become so deeply involved in the circumstances which regarded her, he felt himself almost bound as it were to attend this appointment. Besides, for aught that he knew, the promised communication might in some way regard his own interests; or it might have reference to the innocent child and the persons who had charge of it. Thus, all things considered, our hero had speedily made up his mind to keep the appointment; and he was now bending his way towards the ruins of St. Nicholas.

He could not help thinking that it was a somewhat strange coincidence which had led the Countess of Camerino to appoint for the place of meeting the very spot where only a week previously he had found himself one of the principals in a duel: but then he thought, "After all, there is nothing ominous in the circumstance; for the place is convenient in its seclusion, and may therefore serve for an appointment of one kind as well as of another."

Thus musing, Charles De Vere entered amongst

the ruins. The sun had already set, and the dilapidated edifice was involved in semi-obscure. Still it was light enough to discern all objects; and Charles looked around with the expectation of beholding the Countess. He did not however perceive her—he saw no one. He passed further into the midst of the ruins—he stood near a dilapidated gateway, and again gazed about him. All of a sudden he heard a rustling amidst the evergreens which grew there in rich luxuriance; and the next moment two men sprang out upon him. Both had drawn swords in their hands—both rushed furiously at him with the intention of taking his life. At a glance he perceived the terrific danger which threatened him; and with the abruptness as well as with the force of a tiger springing on his prey, the gallant De Vere darted at his foremost assailant. Grasping the naked weapon which was pointed against his breast, he thrust it aside, and hurled to the ground the individual who bore it. At the same moment he recognised Silvio. In the twinkling of an eye he sprang upon the other ruffian—a tall, elderly man, with dark complexion, and who indeed was none other than the surgeon Visso. It was by a miracle that Charles escaped a mortal thrust from that miscreant's sword: but closing with him as rapidly as thought itself flits through the brain, he dashed him violently against the gateway.

All this was the work of a moment; and the next instant Charles darted again upon Viscount Silvio, who was just springing up to his feet. Our hero tore the sword from his grasp—and with the violence of the proceeding the blade was snapped in twain. In the meantime up sprang the surgeon Visso from the ground: but Charles, with a fragment of Silvio's sword in his hand, rushed to encounter him. The surgeon was seized with a sudden terror—he turned to fly—his foot tripped—he fell heavily. Then Silvio came bounding forward: he snatched up the surgeon's sword which he had dropped—and with a cry of rage he made a desperate thrust at our hero. At the same time he drew a dagger from beneath his garments; and thus doubly armed, he seemed to hold De Vere's life at his mercy at that instant. The surgeon Visso, perceiving this sudden change of affairs, rushed back to the spot—Charles was hurled down—and now his very moments seemed numbered, for Silvio was on the point of assassinating him—the infinitesimal point of time indicated by the twinkling of an eye would have sealed his fate, had not Ginevra suddenly burst upon the scene, giving utterance to the wildest cries!

Viscount Silvio, dropping his sword in consternation and dismay, turned towards Ginevra—the surgeon Visso fled—and Charles De Vere started up to his feet. But at the same time he clutched the weapon which the young Viscount had let fall from his hand; and seizing upon Silvio, he exclaimed, "Wretch! I might now take your life if I chose—but I am not an assassin! I will surrender you up to justice!"

Silvio made one desperate effort to release himself: but Charles quickly convinced him that his struggling was ineffectual—for he held him with a powerful grasp, at the same time holding the point of the sword towards his breast, and ejaculating, "Resist—and I strike!"

"Oh! in the name of all the blessed Saints," cried the distracted Ginevra, "let there be peace between you! Good heavens, in what utter miseries do I find myself involved! Silvio, down upon your knees and implore this gentleman to pardon you! Grovel at his feet if needful—lick the very dust from his boots—do anything to obtain his forgiveness!"

"Lady," said Charles De Vere, still keeping a firm hold upon his prisoner, "there are outrages which cannot be pardoned! In another moment my life would have been sacrificed—and this wretch, with his companion bravo, would have recked not that a mother should soon be weeping in bitterness for her son! How, then, can I be expected to show mercy when none was to be shown to me?"

Ginevra clasped her hands in anguish and despair: Silvio's looks were now fierce, sombre, and desperate.

"Well, let the worst happen!" he exclaimed. "I am tired of life—and the only favour I ask this gentleman is that he will slay me at once!"

"No, my lord," cried Charles, with indignation: "I again tell you that I am not an assassin! But answer me—why did you seek my life? what harm had I done you?"

"Look you, sir," responded the Viscount, with a desperate recklessness of tone and manner, as if he now meant to abandon himself entirely to his wretched fate without another effort to avert it. "When a man has plunged deeply into sin, and has become inextricably involved in the whirlpool of villanies, calamities, and disasters, it is certain that here and there some one will cross his path—some one will stand in his way—and with the hope of saving himself he asks mercilessly to sacrifice whosoever appears thus to thwart him."

"But I, my lord—what harm have I done you?" demanded our hero.

"Oh! it is needless to enter into particulars," exclaimed Silvio, not speaking with either scorn or hauteur, but still in the same tone of desperate recklessness as before. "Pray do your worst at once. I am ready to accompany you to the felon's gaol—aye, even to ascend the steps of the scaffold itself: for I am wearied of this struggle against circumstances—I am tired of battling to emancipate myself from the web which my own crimes have woven—and the sooner I escape from this world the better. If life were a garment which could be put off at will, I would with my own hand throw it off at once!"

"Oh! such language is terrible and hideous!" cried Ginevra, whose countenance was distorted and convulsed with the intense agony of her feelings. "Pardon him—for heaven's sake forgive him—I entreat you!" and she sank weeping bitterly at the feet of Charles De Vere.

"God knows that he is not in a fitting frame of mind to die!" exclaimed our hero; "and if I thought that a generous action on my part—"

"Oh! you are good and noble-minded," cried Ginevra, looking up with hope beaming upon her countenance: "pardon him! forgive him!—and he will yet live to bless you for your generosity!"

There was another moment's hesitation on our hero's part; and then suddenly quitting his hold upon Silvio's garments, he said, "Depart, my lord—I give you your life!—and whatever your

motive may have been in seeking my death, let me hope that your vengeance is now disarmed!"

Silvio bent upon Charles De Vere a look in which astonishment and gratitude were for a moment blended; and then, as his countenance suddenly grew sombre again, he said in a voice of corresponding gloominess, "I scarcely thank you for your generosity—perhaps it were better that I should have gone hence to the gall and thence to the scaffold! But since you will that it should be otherwise, I must yield. Ginevra, do you accompany me?"

"Signor," said the Countess of Camerino, rising from her kneeling posture and thus addressing Charles De Vere, "your conduct towards me has been altogether of the most magnanimous and generous description——"

"I need not your ladyship's thanks," interrupted our hero: "but I must proffer you my own—for you saved my life! Yet, Ah! when I bethink me, how came you to pen that billet——"

"Oh, Signor! believe not for an instant," exclaimed Ginevra, "that I had a treacherous intent or that I sought to place your life in danger! No!—I take heaven to witness that I would sooner perish than harm a single hair of your head! O Silvio! how could you have done this?"

She turned round towards the spot where the young Viscount had a moment before been standing: but he was no longer there—he had suddenly taken his departure.

"Ah, he is gone!" said the Countess: and then bursting into tears, she cried, "Oh, if you knew everything——"

"Alas! I do know everything," exclaimed Charles; "and it seems that the moment is come when I should inform you that I am thus well instructed. Yes, Countess of Camerino! I know how it is that the Viscount Silvio has obtained this influence over you——"

"Ah! you know everything?"—and Ginevra seemed ready to sink down upon the earth with mingled shame and despair. "Yes—you must know everything—or at least you must have by this time suspected it! Oh, Signor! do you not hate and loathe me?—do you not regret that you could ever have displayed the slightest sympathy on my behalf?"

"There are but few circumstances of life," answered Charles De Vere, "in which a person can regret having rendered a service to a fellow-creature. But the services I have rendered your ladyship assume an aspect most perilous to myself; and if I am now tarrying in conversation with you here, it is in the hope of learning something that may guide me for the future—for at present it appears to me as if I were walking amidst pitfalls——"

"Signor," interrupted Ginevra, "I take heaven to witness that I myself understand not wherefore Viscount Silvio should have contemplated a horrible deed of assassination! But my brain is bewildered—I cannot collect my thoughts—all my ideas are in confusion—I can think of nothing unless it be that my husband is in Naples——"

"What! the Count of Camerino?" ejaculated Charles in astonishment.

"Yes—the injured and outraged Count of Camerino!" rejoined Ginevra, in a deeply mourn-

ful voice. "He is in Naples—concealed somewhere—watching me in secret—for his suspicions have been aroused—at least so Silvio told me——"

"And the billet which you wrote me?" inquired Charles.

"Silvio implored and entreated that I would procure him the means of obtaining an interview with you—he said that you could save us—that he must see you—that he would appeal to your generosity——"

"And he came armed with sword and dagger, and accompanied by a bravo, to kill me!"

"Ah, my wretched uncle!" exclaimed Ginevra; "him likewise will you pardon?"

"Your uncle?" said Charles inquiringly.

"Yes—with shame and sorrow do I admit that that man was my uncle, Signor Viso. He lives at that house beneath the portico of which you halted on that memorable night——"

"I recollect full well," said our hero. "But tell me—for what reason could the Viscount seek my life? and wherefore should your uncle rouse him in the iniquitous attempt?"

"I swear to you I know not! This morning I met Silvio in the church: he told me his father—my husband—was in Naples: he said also that we were suspected—that we stood upon a mine—and that you alone could save us. Bewildered! and half-distracted, I hastened home and penned that billet which had the effect of bringing you hither this evening. It was not until the hour fixed for the appointment was drawing near, that I began to reflect upon the step I had taken. Then uneasy feelings arose within me—vague misgivings—mis-trust of Silvio—until my apprehensions grew into an intolerable agony, and I sped hither to assure myself that I had not unconsciously become the means for the perpetration of any deed of treachery. And heaven be thanked that I came!"

"Lady, you saved my life," interrupted Charles; "and this I cannot forget. Thanks to you, an affectionate mother will not be doomed to weep in bitterness for the loss of her only son. And there is another too——"

He was alluding to Agnes: his heart swelled with emotions—he stopped short, and hastily dashed away the tears from his eyes.

"Signor, I comprehend you," said Ginevra gently: "there is one who is dear to you and who would have been crushed down with affliction for your loss? You love, then," she continued, in a tone that was very low and tremulous, but yet audible; "and if you understand the power of love, you may perhaps be enabled to make some little allowance for me. I was left an orphan at an early age—my father died in bankrupt circumstances—my uncle and aunt gave me an asylum. I am not going to trouble you with a long narrative: but I crave your attention to a few hastily sketched facts. It is not quite two years ago that at some grand religious festival I attracted the notice of the Count of Camerino. He inquired who I was—he sought me at my humble abode—he offered me his hand. At that time I knew no more of love than its mere name. I was dazzled by the prospects of rank and wealth; I was not happy with my relatives—can you wonder, therefore, if I accepted the proposal. I became the Countess of Camerino—the marriage was solemnized in private

—and from the comparatively poor dwelling in that obscure quarter of the city, I was suddenly transported to a palatial mansion of which I became the mistress. The Viscount Silvio was then absent; and I had never seen him. He returned in a few weeks; and he was presented to me as his father's youthful bride. I was too young to play the part of a mother-in-law: I therefore thought that we might be towards one another as sister and brother. Delusive hope! In a short time I found that my heart experienced strange feelings whenever Silvio approached me; and I trembled all over if I happened to find myself alone with him. I became afraid of my own thoughts: I already felt frightened as if I were standing on the brink of a precipice: but Silvio continued to treat me with mingled friendliness and respect. Then came the memorable fifth of January, at the beginning of the present year——"

"The date," said Charles inquiringly, "when the conspiracy exploded?"

"The same," responded Ginevra. "Alas! the Count and his son were both compelled to fly—and I remained alone at the palatial mansion. At the expiration of three weeks I learnt through the Marquis of Ortona that my husband the Count was in Paris, and that Silvio was in Vienna. But in the evening of the very same day when I received this intelligence, Silvio sent me a billet entreating me to meet him at a particular place. Thinking that he had some tidings to communicate in reference to his father, I hesitated not to speed to the place of appointment. Then he told his love! He said that scarcely had he reached Vienna when he felt that he could not live without me, and he returned secretly to Naples. I cannot—I need not dwell upon this scene. Suffice it to say I listened—I loved—I was weak—and I fell!"

Here Ginevra's voice sank to a scarcely audible whisper; and for upwards of a minute she remained silent, the tears falling down her cheeks. At length she resumed in the following manner:—

"Silvio remained concealed in Naples for a few weeks, until at last I persuaded him to go back to Vienna. I dreaded lest his presence should be discovered by the police;—and there was another reason why it was absolutely necessary for him to return into Austria. This was that his father would think it strange if he did not write; and any letters that were written, must be dated from Vienna. So we parted. But alas! in a short time I found that I was in a way to become a mother—the result of my fatal love for Silvio! I concealed my position as long as I could; and then I went to stay with my uncle and aunt. There I became a mother. About a month back Silvio returned to Naples—And now, Signor," added Ginevra, thus abruptly winding up her history, "you know everything."

"And you say that the Count of Camerino is now in Naples?" inquired Charles, "and that his suspicions are excited?"

"So Silvio assured me," replied Ginevra. "But I know not what to think or what to believe! Ah, Signor! all my confidence in Silvio has been destroyed——"

"I know it," said our hero; "and I will now deal frankly with you. You remember your interview with the Viscount in the church——"

"Yes," exclaimed Ginevra: "it was on the very day that you yourself were there! But you had left the church before that interview took place——"

"No—I was still there—and I heard it all. Thus you see, lady, that at that date I had reason to suspect your love for Silvio was even more than an illicit one: but it was not until the other night, when for the first time I learnt your name at the British Ambassador's mansion, that I comprehended the entire mystery! However, enough on that point. And now in respect to this assassin attack which has been made upon myself, I can only account for it by the supposition that the Viscount Silvio feared that I should treacherously betray the secret, and that he therefore sought to remove me from his path. Indeed his own words are now proclaimed this much——"

"And now I am left in the most horrible uncertainty with regard to my husband!" said Ginevra, wringing her hands bitterly. "Perhaps I shall see Silvio no more:—what am I to do? I have no friend whom I can consult. Not for worlds would I seek my uncle and aunt: I loathe and detest them! I have no right to intrude my own griefs and perplexities upon you; and yet I am in that position which requires immediate action. Ah! I recollect!—there is one who will counsel me—one who is already acquainted with my fearful secret——"

"Acquainted with your secret?" ejaculated Charles in astonishment. "To whom do you allude?"

"To a worthy priest, who though a young man, is nevertheless renowned for his piety——"

"Do you mean Father Falconara?" asked our hero quickly.

"Yes—the same," rejoined Ginevra. "On that very occasion to which you have already referred, when I met Silvio in the church, I confessed to Father Falconara——"

"Lady," interrupted Charles, "you are indeed only too well justified in doubting and mistrusting Silvio! If it were on that occasion alone that in the confessional you breathed the secrets of your heart, Father Falconara is still ignorant of them: for beneath the Dominican garb was Viscount Silvio himself then concealed!"

For a moment utter dismay and consternation seized upon the Countess of Camerino: but the next instant a light flashed in unto her mind. She recollected the circumstances of that scene in the confessional—especially how she had been answered only in monosyllables; and thus all that in the agonized and bewildered state of her feelings at the time she had failed to look upon as peculiar, now struck her as unmistakably confirmatory of Charles De Vere's assurance.

"Oh, that I could have ever loved a being capable of such black treachery and such dark crimes as Silvio!"—and the wretched young lady was overwhelmed with a renewed grief. "But why, Signor—oh, why did you suffer this hideous mockery and frightful hypocrisy to take place?"

"Listen, lady," he replied; "for the circumstance does indeed demand explanation: I obtained but the merest glimpse of the features concealed beneath the cowl; and it had likewise been the merest glimpse that I had previously caught of Silvio's countenance—I mean on the

memorable night when you entrusted your child to my charge. As for Father Falconara, I had never to my knowledge seen him at all. How, then, could I tell that the individual in the Dominican dress was *not* Father Falconara? I suspected it—but I was not sure. This evening, however, I have acquired the certainty that the suspicion was well founded. For the first time have I obtained a full and perfect view of Viscount Silvio's face; and now therefore would I upon oath affirm that it is the same which I beheld beneath the Dominican hood."

"Signor," said Ginevra, in a voice expressive of utter misery, "I am so completely weighed down by calamities of all descriptions—my path seems to be so beset with perils, treacheries, and duplicities—all the consequences of my own crime!—that I am reduced to the very verge of despair. I am without energy—without power to help myself. I shall return to my home like a doomed person, and await whatever fresh evils my destiny may bring down upon my head. Upon you, generous Englishman, my griefs and perplexities shall be no more obtruded! Yet there is one last favour which I would implore at your hands——"

"You have saved my life, lady: and besides, you are unhappy!" responded Charles. "I will not refuse you this favour. Speak!—What is it?"

"I am not sure whether this morning I rightly comprehended Silvio," said Ginevra; "but the impression is strong upon my mind—and now, having received another terrific proof of how desperate his character is—I fear—Oh! I fear that if he be really acquainted with the place where my poor babe——"

"Enough, lady!" interrupted Charles De Vere; "I comprehend you. You display the feelings of a mother: they are entitled to respect, and they claim my sympathy. I will repair hence to Nino Corso's dwelling—I will put him upon his guard: in a word, rest assured that I will give such instructions as shall protect that innocent babe against any machinations which the unprincipled Silvio may possibly set afoot."

"A thousand, thousand thanks, generous Signor!" exclaimed the Countess of Camerino in a voice of the most grateful enthusiasm. "And now farewell!"

With these words she glided forth from amidst the ruins in one direction, while Charles De Vere took his departure by another. For precaution's sake he kept possession of the sword with which his own life had been so terribly threatened half-an-hour back: for the way was lonely between the ruins and the suburb of Naples. He however proceeded unmolested: and before he entered the city he tossed the weapon over a hedge into a garden.

But in the meanwhile what had become of the Viscount Silvio? He had suddenly disappeared, as the reader has been informed, at the moment when Ginevra turned round to address her reproaches unto him; and his intention actually was to speed away from the spot and abandon himself utterly to his fate without another effort to avert exposure and all its frightful consequences. But scarcely was he beyond the ruins, when a change came abruptly over him: his soul sickened at the thought of his guilt becoming known to his father;

and all in a moment he resolved to exert his energies in a last desperate effort to save himself. He stole back amidst the ruins—he crept towards the gateway—he listened and overheard everything that took place between Charles and Ginevra. When the instant came that they separated, and as their forms were gliding in opposite directions from the midst of the ruins, Silvio stole from his hiding-place, and anxiously looked about to see whether Charles De Vere had taken a weapon with him. If he had gone forth unarmed, Silvio was resolved to speed after him and assassinate him with one of the weapons he had left behind. But while one sword lay broken upon the ground, the other was not to be seen:—the Viscount therefore knew that Charles *had* taken it with him!

"No matter!" he ejaculated within himself: "he is still in my power! One bold stroke and I shall yet be safe!"

While thus mentally exclaiming, Viscount Silvio sped away from the ruins; and with the utmost celerity which he could command, he dashed on towards Naples, taking care however to avoid the path which our young hero was pursuing at a comparatively slow pace.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE THICKENING OF THE PLOT.

It is now time to explain the guilty purposes which Viscount Silvio had entertained *previous* to the adventure in the ruins. The reader has of course seen that one of these objects was the assassination of Charles De Vere. Had this hideous plan succeeded, Silvio would have hastened to his father, and would have addressed him in some such terms as these:—"You are avenged, my dear father! Smarting under the sense of the tremendous wrong which you have sustained, I found it impossible to wear the mask of dissimulation in Charles De Vere's presence. I reproached him for his villany—high words ensued—we fought—and I have killed him!"

Thus would Silvio have spoken to his father if murder's work had that evening been accomplished in the ruins of St. Nicholas. But what other plan did the unscrupulous Silvio entertain? His mind was made up how to act. He had given Ginevra an appointment to meet him again in the church on the ensuing morning; he would thence on some pretext have enticed her elsewhere—and he would have assassinated *her* also! Indeed, with a devilish iniquity he had planned how to give to this second murder the appearance of suicide. Therefore, if both Charles De Vere and Ginevra had been removed from the world, Silvio's secret would have been safe. The former would not have lived to give explanations when confronted by the Count of Camerino—while in respect to the latter there would have been no further dread of a confession issuing from her lips.

Such were the diabolical plans and such were the calculations of the Viscount Silvio *previous* to the adventure in the ruins: but there, when the crisis came, all his foul projects seemed suddenly scattered to the winds, partly by the prowess of Charles De Vere himself, and partly by the sudden



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appearance of Ginevra. Now, however, a new device—a last and desperate one—had suggested itself; and the young nobleman was hastening to put it into execution.

Silvio reached the Via Graciosa some time before Charles De Vere; and hastily giving the password to the old porter, the Viscount rushed up the staircase to his father's room.

"What tidings, Silvio?" asked the Count of Camerino, whose face was more careworn and ghastly than on the preceding evening, but in whose eyes there burnt the fires of a stern sombre resolution.

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"He is coming, father!—he will be here immediately!" exclaimed Silvio. "You have but the shortest possible space for your preparations!"

"And they are soon made, my son," rejoined the nobleman, as he drew a posierd from beneath his garments. "Here, Silvio, in the middle of this room—upon his knees—shall the young villain vainly implore my mercy; and I will gloat over his agony and anguish ere I deal the fatal blow!"

"No, father!" exclaimed Silvio, "you must not do this! It would be mean and unworthy of you! Strike him dead at once——"

"Silence, Silvio!" ejaculated the Count in a stern voice: "no one shall be permitted to step between me and my vengeance in the way that I may choose to wreak it!"

The young Viscount dared not give utterance to another word—but terror seized upon him: he was almost overwhelmed by consternation and dismay; for he saw that if there were time for explanations between his father and Charles De Vere, the former would be quickly disabused of his belief in respect to the latter, and everything might be exposed. The bewilderment which Silvio experienced was a perfect excruciation: it was almost a punishment sufficient to atone for the fearful crimes he had committed. Suddenly an idea struck him; and he said, "Father, I think it most probable that Charles De Vere will have a sword or some weapon about his person; for these foreigners are cautious when coming into the obscure districts of the city——"

"Let him have weapons," interrupted the Count of Camerino: "do you think he will dare use them? When I look that young man in the face, and announce to him that I whom he believes to be a ruined merchant or banker skulking away from his creditors, am in reality the Count of Camerino whose wife he has basely seduced—he will be overwhelmed with shame, consternation, and horror—he will not dare draw forth a weapon—but mine will be ready at hand—and as it flashes before his eyes, he will sink down a guilty wretch, all trembling upon his knees!"

"No doubt, father—no doubt!" said Silvio. "But for heaven's sake allow him not leisure to regain the slightest particle of self-possession—drive the dagger deep down into his heart—or if not he will treacherously draw forth a pistol, and you may lie weltering in your own blood instead of shedding that of the man who has dishonoured you!"

"Fear nothing, Silvio," replied the Count: "his doom is sealed! The warning you have given me in respect to weapons being hidden about his person, is salutary and shall not be neglected. You will remain here, Silvio: you must see this deadly deed of vengeance!"

Again the Viscount shuddered to the nethermost confines of his being; and he was just upon the point of devising some excuse to pass over to Nino Corso's room opposite, when footsteps were heard ascending the stairs.

"Now the moment is approaching!" said the Count of Camerino, in a dark sombre voice: and he advanced towards the door,—while Silvio, in a condition of mind scarcely enviable even by one about to be hanged, paced towards the opposite extremity of the little room in the hope of concealing his countenance as long as possible from Charles De Vere.

Placing himself against the window, with his face towards the curtain, Silvio awaited the approaching crisis with an indescribable agony of suspense. For matters had not progressed as he had hoped and expected: he had fancied that his father would at once strike the young Englishman down; but that intimation of leaving a few moments' leisure to gloat over De Vere's condition, was terribly menacing to the safety of the Viscount.

Meanwhile Charles was ascending the staircase for no purpose of seeking Nino Corso's apartment

and executing the mission entrusted to him by Gi-nevra. Just as he reached the landing he perceived that the door of the opposite room stood ajar; for a light was issuing between the opening—and Charles wondered to himself whether that room was still occupied by the insolvent merchant hiding himself from his creditors.

The next instant that door opened completely; and the individual whom Charles supposed to be the ruined merchant, appeared upon the threshold. The youth was instantaneously struck by the altered countenance of that personage—so haggard, careworn, and ghastly was it! His generous soul was smitten with compassion; for he naturally conceived this changed countenance to be the result of affliction on account of his affairs.

"Good heavens, my dear sir!" said Charles, hastening forward. "I am afraid you must have been ill since I last saw you——"

"Pray walk in," said the Count of Camerino: and Charles was struck by the sombre gloominess of the tone in which he spoke, while at the same time he fancied that there was a sinister gleaming in the stranger's dark eyes.

Charles however readily followed the Count into the room:—indeed he was glad of an opportunity to administer consolation, and to offer such services as he might be enabled to afford. He entered therefore:—a glance showed him the figure of another man standing at the window, but partially concealed by the curtain as if he were looking from behind it through the casement into the street. Our hero had not time to recognise that figure: for scarcely had he entered the room when the supposed ruined merchant seized upon him violently with one hand, brandished with the other the naked dagger before his eyes, and exclaimed, "Down upon your knees, villain! and prepare to die!"

So sudden was this onslaught—so completely was Charles taken off his guard—and so vigorous was the arm of his assailant, that he was actually forced down into the very position which he had been ordered to take,—namely, upon his knees. Then, ere there was time for a single syllable to go forth from his lips, or before he could even make a single effort to rescue himself, the supposed bankrupt merchant added in a fierce vindictive tone, "Know me at length! I am the Count of Camerino!"

It was no wonder if an ejaculation of astonishment burst from Charles De Vere's lips at this announcement, or if his features should reflect the whirlwind of thoughts which suddenly swept through his mind; so that to the morbid imagination of the Count of Camerino the youth's looks were those of conscious guilt.

"I have heard your name, my lord," said Charles: "but little did I think—Unhand me!" he suddenly interrupted himself, "and let me rise! I have injured you not—neither am I capable of betraying you!"

"Wretch, you have betrayed me far more cruelly than if you had handed me over to the grasp of justice! Prepare to die! Your last moment is come!"—and the dagger was lifted high up ready to be plunged deep down into the heart of our hero.

A light flashed in unto the mind of Charles De Vere: the words just used by the Count were

a revelation—our hero comprehended in a moment how suspicion in respect to Ginevra had pointed towards himself.

"By heaven, my lord!" he exclaimed, "you wrong me!—you are cruelly deceived!"

"You lie, wretch!" vociferated the Count. "The evidence—there—yonder—the child——"

"This is madness!" cried De Vere, as all in an instant he sprang up to his feet and caught the arm which was descending to bury the dagger in his breast. "Madman that you are! I have not yet been quite a month at Naples!"

This assertion, so curt and trenchant, so complete in itself, having no need of preface nor peroration—staggered the Count of Camerino in a moment. But at that very same instant Silvio came bounding across the room to seize upon De Vere and hold him as an easy prey for the Count's dagger.

"Stand back, my lord!" exclaimed Charles, bending a stern look upon the Viscount. "It is not destined that my blood is to be shed this night!"—and it was a significant look which he flung upon the young nobleman.

"But is this possible?" gasped forth the Count of Camerino, alluding to the assertion which Charles De Vere had just before made. "You have only been a month——"

"Look, my lord! here is my passport! Satisfy yourself."

Thus speaking, our hero handed the document to the Count of Camerino; and while the nobleman hastily ran his eyes over it, Viscount Silvio, who had left Charles unmolested, seized that opportunity to whisper in our hero's ear, "He will murder me, his own son—he will murder his wife—he will assassinate the babe likewise, if you betray the secret!"

"Rest assured, my lord," replied Charles, "I shall not travel out of my way to shock and crush a father with the intelligence that he has been dishonoured by his own son!"

These speeches were so quickly exchanged and in such low fitting whispers, that the Count of Camerino heard them not: indeed all his attention was absorbed for the moment in the passport which he held in his hands. For a few instants he looked confounded; and then suddenly starting as if galvanized by a new idea, he turned almost fiercely upon Charles, saying, "But you may have been at Naples on a previous occasion and with another passport!"

"Now listen, my lord!" said our hero firmly and resolutely. "This is so serious a matter that it must at once be set at rest so far as I am concerned. My conduct shall prove to you whether I am an innocent or a guilty person. I will consent to remain here while you send some trustworthy messenger to the British Embassy to make all inquiries concerning me: you shall hold that dagger in your hand, with the point against my breast; and if when the messenger returns he give you aught but satisfactory intelligence, then may you plunge the dagger into my heart!"

The Count of Camerino was perfectly bewildered: it was impossible that he could resist the frankness and candour of Charles De Vere's language and bearing.

"My God! what does it all mean?" he at length exclaimed. "That child—that child—is it not——"

"My lord," interrupted Charles, "I will not answer you a single question until you have become perfectly satisfied that it is utterly impossible I can have any other interest in the babe than that of one into whose hands it was accidentally thrown!"

"By heaven, I believe you!" cried the Count of Camerino. "But I am bewildered! There seems some dreadful mystery——"

"There may be, my lord—and there doubtless is!" said Charles: "but I have no guilty participation in it. Appearances may have been against me—I can understand how you, the Count of Camerino, a frequent visitor at that room—the child itself there—the Countess visiting the place the day before yesterday——Ah! I see it all! Yes, yes—I comprehend it now!"

The Count of Camerino was almost inclined to admit at once that he entirely absolved Charles De Vere from the suspicion which had rested against him: but still his recent experiences of the duplicities of the world made him hesitate ere he spoke to that effect. His confidence in humanity had been fearfully shaken by his discovery of Ginevra's guilt—his mind was already rendered morbid—he was prepared to take the worst view of things and to believe that dissimulation everywhere prevailed around him. After a few moments' reflection, he said to Charles, "You will wait here till my return. I am going to make a certain inquiry—and I hold you to your pledge that you will consent to be under guard, with that dagger imminent above your head. My son, the Viscount Silvio, will act as sentinel——"

"No, my lord!" interrupted Charles firmly: "I have nothing to do with your son—I have to do only with yourself. Into your keeping I may entrust my life: but to the keeping of another—no!"

The Count was smitten with the idea of some sinister or perfidious motive on De Vere's part: all his suspicions flamed up anew—his eyes flashed fierce fire—his brows corrugated—and in a hoarse voice he muttered, "By heaven! I half believe him guilty after all!"

Charles caught these words; and as a sudden recollection struck him, he said, "Listen to me, my lord! If I prove to you that I never was in Naples before my arrival a month back with the British Ambassador, you will be satisfied that I am innocent of any complicity in your dishonour. Look!" he continued, drawing forth his pocket-book and producing a letter; "this is from my mother in England. The very first lines are significant of the fact which I am desirous to prove to your lordship—and you see how recent is the date! Mark these words:—'By the day this letter reaches you, my dear Charles, you will have for the first time set foot upon the Italian shore——'"

"Enough!" interrupted the Count of Camerino, a revulsion of feeling once more taking place in the youth's favour. "I ought to be convinced—and yet such is my state of mind——What think you, Silvio?" he demanded, abruptly turning round towards his son, whose presence for the last few minutes he appeared to have forgotten.

"I think, father," the Viscount hastened to respond, "that Signor De Vere has fully acquitted

and justified himself—that he is a most honourable young gentleman—that both of us must deeply deplore whatsoever misapprehensions and errors we have laboured under concerning him—and that we ought to deem him worthy of our friendship instead of our rancour.”

As Silvio thus spoke, he flung a significant glance upon De Vere, as much as to say, “Since you are sufficiently generous to keep the fatal secret, I am anxious to testify my gratitude.”

“You have spoken well and wisely, my dear son,” said the Count of Camerino. “Signor De Vere, though you yourself be innocent on a certain point, yet it is evident that you must be acquainted with the author of my dishonour—for it was you who consigned the child to the keeping of the worthy couple in the opposite apartment. I adjure you to name him!—name him, I entreat and command!”

“Though making all charitable allowances for your lordship’s excited feelings,” replied Charles, “and indeed profoundly commiserating your lordship on account of the heavy afflictions which in so many ways have befallen you, I am nevertheless constrained to deny your lordship’s right to command me in any respect. Accident more or less involved me in these mysteries: would to God I had never been thus dragged into their complicated web! But I will not mention the name which you seek to elicit from my lips. This only will I say—and I invoke heaven to attest the truth of the averment—that the individual whose name you demand is no friend of mine!”

The Count of Camerino again looked deeply perplexed: he bit his lip—he was more than half inclined to have recourse to the most deadly menaces to elicit the name from De Vere’s lips; but his natural sense of justice and the habitual magnanimity of his disposition made him comprehend that he had no right thus to act. At length he said, “Will you remain here, Signor, for a few minutes? Your pledge shall be deemed sufficient—there shall be no terrorism exercised—you are your own master to do as you think fit. I now entreat—I do not attempt to command.”

Thus speaking, the Count concealed the dagger about his person; and Charles De Vere, who for many reasons was anxious to see the issue of the present complex progress of affairs, said, “Yes, my lord—I will remain here until your return.”

“His well,” said the Count: and without taking either his hat or cloak, he at once issued from the apartment; so that Charles felt convinced he was merely about to seek the opposite room.

The instant the door closed behind the Count of Camerino, Silvio approached our hero, saying, “You have acted the noblest part, Signor De Vere—”

“Stand back, my lord!” interrupted Charles, with a cold sternness of voice and look: “how do I know but that you may have a bravo’s weapon concealed about your person? You saw that I would not trust myself alone with you, unarmed as I am, if you were to have had your father’s dagger in your hand!”

The Viscount had at first turned pale with shame and rage at the taunt thrown out: he bit his lip almost till the blood came; but mastering the emotions which had excited his hot Italian blood, he said in a meek sorrowful voice, “You

have a right thus to reproach me, Signor De Vere: but I swear to you that in the presence of your nobly generous conduct I am incapable of doing you a mischief—and I have *now* no interest in attempting it.”

“Ah! I understand!” ejaculated our hero; “and the suspicion which I entertained was correct! You sought to make away with me because you feared that if I met your father I should prove to him that I had not been guilty towards him, and he would therefore have to seek elsewhere for the author of his dishonour?”

“Yes—it was so,” responded the young Viscount. “Alas! Signor De Vere, crime is horribly prolific! It is like the reptile which brings forth a swarm of a venomous brood! Yes, Signor—your conjecture is the right one!—and if I dared ask your pardon—”

“Pardon, my lord?” ejaculated Charles, scornfully: “there is no pardon for such assassin intentions as those! I gave you your life, more through pity for the frail and wretched accomplice of your deep damning iniquity towards your own father—”

“Hush, for heaven’s sake! he may overhear you!” said the Viscount, trembling all over with mingled rage, shame, and terror. “But tell me, Signor—tell me, I conjure you—is it possible that Nino Corso and his wife can afford my father the slightest clue to the discovery of the hideous secret?”

“I firmly believe they cannot,” rejoined De Vere: then, after a brief pause, he said, as he looked Silvio fixedly in the face, “Do you know the only means by which this secret which you so appropriately term a hideous one, can be for ever concealed? Because, for the sake of humanity, I should indeed be glad to know that it could never become developed to the knowledge of your unhappy father! It is sufficient that he has obtained such deep damning proof of his wife’s frailty, without being crushed completely to the ground by the discovery of his own son’s crowning infamy!”

“What means are there of keeping the secret?” asked Silvio eagerly.

“That the Countess of Camerino should retire to a convent,” replied Charles, “and that you should never seek to see her more.”

“Oh! if she could be induced to take this step,” exclaimed Silvio, “it would indeed prove effective—unless indeed at this very moment my father be obtaining some clue which we suspect not—”

“I tell you, my lord, I do not think that it is probable,” interrupted De Vere. “I will see the Countess to-morrow—I will earnestly conjure her to retire at once to a convent—and I will guarantee to her your own pledge that never more will you seek to intrude your presence upon her!”

“A thousand thanks—But hush!” ejaculated Silvio: “was not that a footstep upon the stairs?—a light footstep like that of a female?”

“Yes,” answered Charles: “but it may have been the step of Benedetta—for it is indeed little likely that the Countess would visit this house to-night. Oh, my lord! you see what it is to have a guilty conscience!”

But here we will leave the two young men together in the one room upon that floor, while we

follow the Count of Camerino into the other. It was Nino Corso's apartment to which he thus hastened. Nino himself was absent, plying his usual avocation: the children were all sleeping in their beds: Benedetta was preparing the evening meal against her husband's return.

"Ah, my lord," she said, as the Count entered her apartment; "is it you? I thought you had visitors—I fancied I heard footsteps ascending just now to your room—and Oh! my lord, for heaven's sake take care! I tremble on your account; for remember that on a former occasion a spy betrayed everything! Ah! it is no wonder, my lord, that you are full of anxiety and excitement—you look dreadfully ill—you are pale and haggard—"

"Well, well, Benedetta," interrupted the Count; "I thank you sincerely for all your generous interest on my behalf. Sit down a moment—I wish to speak to you on something of—of—more or less importance, as it turns out—"

"Good heavens, my lord!" exclaimed the frightened Benedetta; "no danger menaces you, I hope?—nothing has happened to poor Nino?"

"Do not alarm yourself," said the Count: "be composed—be tranquil! Forbear from asking me any questions—but reply to some which I am going to put to you."

Benedetta seated herself; and completely reassured on the nobleman's account as well as on that of her husband, she prepared to listen with attention. He continued thus:—

"You will think it strange that I am going to speak to you on such business—but it is through no vulgar sentiment of curiosity. Tell me then, Benedetta—is not the impression on your mind and on that of Nino, that the child there"—and the Count gasped as he alluded to the babe—"belong to the young Englishman?"

"We have told your lordship all we know of the matter," responded Benedetta. "Sometimes we have fancied that the young Englishman must be the father—but then again, recollecting his assurances, and the seeming frankness and sincerity with which they were given—"

"But tell me, Benedetta," interrupted the Count; "when the evening before last that veiled lady was here—the lady who confessed herself to be the mother of the child—did it not strike you that she alluded to the young Englishman as if he were the father?"

"No doubt it did, my lord," replied Benedetta; "and I said so to my husband afterwards. But Nino entertained a different opinion—"

"Ah! and wherefore?" inquired the Count.

"Let me see?" said Benedetta. "Oh! it was because the lady never mentioned the young Englishman with any degree of tenderness. I remember her words: she simply said, 'He who confided the babe to your keeping, spoke in flattering terms of you both: but him you will never see again.'—Therefore, my lord, Nino concludes that there was nothing in the lady's speech to falsify the assurance which the young gentleman had given us to the effect that he was not the father of the child."

"True!" said the Count of Camerino: and he reflected deeply.

"But why, my lord," asked Benedetta, "are you now interesting yourself—"

"Hush! a footstep!" ejaculated the nobleman: and the next instant he was concealed inside the wardrobe.

Scarcely had the doors of that piece of furniture closed upon the Count of Camerino, when the door of the apartment itself opened, and the veiled lady made her appearance. We should here observe that after the terrific scene amidst the ruins of St. Nicholas, Ginevra had wandered about in an almost distracted state of mind, until thoroughly exhausted, she sat down upon a bank just outside the suburbs of Naples. There she had collected her thoughts: she had meditated upon her position, and upon the course which she ought to pursue. She was wearied of the excitement of the last few weeks: she felt that her reason was tottering upon its throne, and that the endurance of further suspense, anguish, terror, and struggling against circumstances, must terminate in utter madness. Her mind was therefore now made up how to act. She would retire to a convent:—there, until the time should arrive when she could take the veil, she would remain inaccessible to every human being except her father-confessor. She would thus shut out from herself all those worldly turmoils in which she was now so painfully involved; and she would escape her husband's wrath,—believing, as she did, that the discovery of everything was imminent. But ere she sought the convent, she had yet a duty to perform: she must communicate certain particulars to those who had the care of her child. No sooner, therefore, was her final resolve taken, than she set off to the Via Graciosa, where she arrived at the same time that her husband was also in Benedetta's apartment.

Ginevra was closely veiled, as on the former occasion; and Benedetta said, "Ah, Signora, is it you?"

"Yes," she replied: "once more and for the last time am I come to visit you! Tell me, has the English gentleman been here this evening?"

"No, Signora," answered Benedetta: "and indeed from what you told us the night before last, I never expected to see him again."

"Perhaps he will come presently—indeed he is almost sure to come," resumed Ginevra: "but you may tell him that I have already been—and that it is needless for him to interest himself further in my unfortunate affairs—the message I gave him—"

"But is it not natural, Signora," inquired Benedetta, thus dexterously putting a leading question,—"is it not natural that he should interest himself—he who is the father—?"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Ginevra; "are you labouring under such an error? Oh! that young English gentleman is all honour and virtue!—and it was a series of strange accidents which gradually led him on to become interested on my behalf! He has not been a month at Naples—and my acquaintance with him dates but from the evening when he confided the poor babe to your care:—that is precisely a fortnight back!"

"Ah! then I was mistaken," said Benedetta. "But perhaps—"

"Do not question me," interrupted Ginevra; "but listen attentively to everything I have to say. I am very, very wretched: the misery of my mind is driving me to madness! The author of my ruin—the father of that poor babe there—may

probably come to demand the child at your hands; or he may put in practice some treacherous machinations to obtain possession of the child——"

"You will tell me who he is, Signora?" said Benedetta, "that I may be all the more completely on my guard."

"It is not necessary to mention the name," replied the Countess, in a low sombre tone: "for rest assured that he himself will not reveal it! The warning I have given you is sufficient: watch over the poor child—surrender it up to no one—and believe no tale with which any stranger may seek you—believe it not, I say, even though you shall receive the assurance that the individual who tells it comes on my behalf! The only person who will ever have a right to seek you—the only person to whom I shall ever breathe the name of the father of that child—is a holy priest; and to his ear shall I to-morrow morning confess everything."

"And that priest, signora," said Benedetta,—"you will at least tell me his name, so that when he presents himself I may know that no treacherous intent is harboured with respect to the child?"

"Yes—I will tell you the priest's name," said Ginevra: "it is Father Falconara. To-morrow, ere the hour of noon be proclaimed, will all my sins be confessed to that holy priest; and by his means shall I at once seek the seclusion of a convent. I am rich; and everything that I can command—jewels and money—shall be divided into two equal portions, one for the benefit of the convent, the other to remain in the hands of Father Falconara, who will act as trustee for my child. Therefore every three or six months may you expect to see that holy father, who will bring you the interest of the money confided to his keeping. Through him will you send me word how progresses my child, so that even in the seclusion of the convent I may at least learn that the innocent one thrives beneath your fostering care!"

Ginevra now took the babe from the cradle and pressed it to her bosom. She wept in anguish—she sobbed convulsively—she turned aside to caress her babe, so that while temporarily raising her veil her countenance might not be seen by Benedetta. The worthy woman herself was deeply affected as she listened to those sobs; and she felt the tears trickling down her own cheeks.

"Signora," she said, in a gentle voice, "I fear that you have known much unhappiness; and even though you may have been guilty——"

"Guilty?" echoed Ginevra, with an accent of frenzy: "yes—deeply, deeply guilty!"—and then she added in a lower voice, "But if there be atonement in the experience of punishment, my guilt has already been more than half atoned for! I am about to quit the great busy world and retire to the seclusion of a convent. Thither shall I carry the sense of my guilt! I have already sworn within myself that to no one except the holy priest to-morrow will I breathe the name of him who was my seducer—my betrayer—the accomplice of my crime! Think not therefore that towards you, my worthy friend, I am displaying a want of confidence that savours of ingratitude. And now farewell! One last kiss upon this poor innocent's cheek—O God! it is hard to tear myself away! and this is not the least portion of the fearful punishment that has overtaken me for my guilt!"

In a half-distracted state of mind the unfortu-

nate Ginevra replaced her babe in the cradle: she then moved towards the door of the apartment—but she could not leave the room—she sank upon a chair, weeping and sobbing bitterly. Then she again rushed to the cradle: she snatched up the child—she pressed it to her bosom: it cried—she gave it into the arms of Benedetta—and she rushed from the apartment.

The concluding portion of this scene was so sad, so heartrending, so affecting, that Benedetta almost completely forgot the Count of Camerino was concealed in the wardrobe; so that when he issued thence she started as if with sudden affright.

"Was it not afflictive, my lord," she said, without raising her eyes; for her looks were bent upon the child whom she was endeavouring to soothe and tranquillize.

"Very afflictive," he answered, but in so cold a tone that Benedetta was for an instant struck with a sensation as if there were heartlessness in it.

The next moment the Count of Camerino issued from the apartment; and rapidly crossing the landing, he re-entered his own room, where he had left his son with Charles De Vere. Silvio was pacing the apartment in an agitated manner; and the instant his sire entered, he glanced around, flinging a look of intense anxiety upon his parent's countenance. Charles was seated: but he rose as the nobleman opened the door.

"Signor De Vere," said the Count, at once accosting our hero, taking his hand, and pressing it with fervour, "I have a thousand, thousand apologies to make you!—most humbly do I entreat your pardon!—for deeply did I wrong you! I have now learnt—no matter how—but I have learnt that you, Signor, are a young man of truth and virtue. Who the author of my dishonour actually may be, I as yet know not. But——"

The Count stopped short, as if suddenly checking himself in the additional statement he was about to make: then perceiving Silvio, he said, "Yes, my dear son——"

The perishing wretch abruptly snatched from drowning, or the felon receiving a reprieve upon the scaffold, experiences not a greater relief than that which suddenly seized upon Silvio. He saw in a moment that he was as yet unsuspected; and he felt that the old adage which declares that "while there is life there is hope," now applied to his own position.

"Yes, my dear son," said the Count of Camerino, "you were right when you just now declared that we ought to regard Signor De Vere with friendship, and not with rancour. I will not detain him here another moment!—it is no longer necessary that I should ask him to tarry within these walls! You can both leave me: I would be alone! but you, Silvio, come to me again to-morrow evening at the same hour."

"I will not fail, father," responded the Viscount. "But—but—have you obtained any clue——"

"Do not question me, my son," interrupted the Count,—"at least not now! I would fain be alone. Leave me, Silvio!"

The young Viscount turned aside to envelope himself in his cloak and slouching hat, and the Count of Camerino, again pressing Charles De Vere's hand with friendly fervour, said in a low hasty whisper, "It is unnecessary for you to visit the

opposite room this evening. The message entrusted to you has already been delivered through another channel!"

Our hero looked astonished: but the Count said, "Farewell!" and at once turned aside.

De Vere and Silvio issued together from the room and descended the staircase. As they passed out into the street the Viscount stopped short, and asked in an almost suffocating voice, "Good heavens! what can all this mean?—has my father indeed obtained a clue?"

"My lord, I know not what to think," replied Charles De Vere. "But I tremble—I confess that I tremble——"

"O God! what will become of me?" moaned the wretched Silvio.

"Instead of thus invoking the name of the Almighty," rejoined De Vere solemnly, "return to your dwelling, wherever it be—fall down upon your knees—and implore God to have mercy upon you for your sins! Pray if you can, my lord—pray for yourself and the hapless Ginevra!"

Having thus spoken, Charles de Vere turned abruptly away, and sped along the street in a contrary direction from that which the Viscount Silvio had begun to take on issuing from the house where his father lodged. Our hero made the best of his way back to the Embassy; and when in the solitude of his own chamber, he deliberated on all that had been taking place.

"What meant the Count by telling me that I need not seek Benedetta's room? through what other channel had Ginevra's message been delivered? Ah! that light step upon the staircase!—could it have been that of Ginevra herself? Is it possible they have met,—that outraged husband and guilty wife? 'Tis scarcely possible!—or else would she have thrown herself at his feet and confessed everything! But 'tis evident that he still suspects not Silvio! Yet the plot is thickening—and I fear the mine will soon explode!"

In this state of bewilderment, uncertainty, and apprehension, Charles sought his couch.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE CHIEF OF POLICE.

ON separating from Charles De Vere, Viscount Silvio proceeded hurriedly through the streets, a prey to an anguish more excruciating than perhaps any which he had previously experienced; for he was racked with a hideous uncertainty and suspense. He rushed on as if seeking to outstrip his own horrible thoughts:—but the bad thoughts of men are never beaten in such a race—they keep up with him—they flock around him—they hem him in—they assume the most appalling shapes to his view—they become palpable and tangible—they are like fiends lashing him with scorpions. Silvio naturally possessed a strong mind: but he now felt that it was yielding and giving way before the constant shocks which it had recently sustained. He was almost convinced that his father had at length acquired some clue which must inevitably carry him on to a discovery of the whole truth; and he recoiled in horror from the idea of again meeting that outraged parent accord-

ing to the appointment given him for the following evening. His terrified imagination pictured to itself the Count of Camerino awaiting him in that room which he had just left—bidding him close the door—then suddenly overwhelming him with looks of lightning as preludes to the thunder-words of accusation. Appalled with the idea, Silvio stopped suddenly short in his hurried frantic course through the street: a sense of oppression came over him as if it were a sun-stroke received in a noon-day of intense sultriness. He staggered and reeled to a stone bench in front of the gate of a market-place.

Though the evening air at that Christmas season was actually very cold, and the wind blew chill from the Bay of Naples, Silvio felt as if he were under the influence of a stifling heat, for his very brain seemed to be on fire. Scarcely conscious of what he was doing, he took off his hat to woo the wind to his feverish brows; and at that instant the moon, peeping from behind a cloud, flung its beams upon his face. A man who was passing on the opposite side of the way, caught a glimpse of the Viscount's features—stopped short—and then retreated to a little distance; for Silvio had all in a moment replaced the hat upon his head. It was not that he perceived that he had been thus noticed; but he was suddenly struck by the imprudence of the action he had committed.

He now arose from the stone bench and continued his way. The man continued to watch him from the opposite side of the street, where he crept stealthily along in the deep shade of the houses. But at a little distance this man overtook another, with whom he was evidently well acquainted:—they exchanged a few rapid words, and then they abruptly crossed the street.

"One word, Signor!" said the first-mentioned man, laying his hand upon Silvio's shoulder.

The Viscount's first impulse was to strike right and left and knock down the two individuals—for the street was a lonely and obscure one: but a pistol was suddenly presented before his face, and the words, "My lord, you are my prisoner!" smote his ear.

These were two agents of the secret police into whose clutches he had fallen. He saw the necessity of surrendering at discretion; and he said, "Harm me not, and I will offer no resistance."

A hackney-coach happening to come along at the instant, and proving to be unoccupied, it was hailed by the police-agents. They entered it with their prisoner, and ordered the driver to proceed at once to the office of the Chief of Police; for this was a most important capture, and one which must immediately be reported to the head authority of the department. Silvio, throwing himself back in the vehicle, spoke not a single word. He scarcely knew whether his arrest were a subject for rejoicing or sadness. It might lead him to the gibbet or to perpetual imprisonment in a dungeon, and thus in any way separate him from the concerns of the world and the progress of the incidents which a few minutes back had been so frightfully excruciating him. Nevertheless, these were evils from which there might possibly be an eventual means of escape; whereas it seemed only too certain that death or eternal incarceration must now be his fate. A little while ago, and the images of his father, Ginevra, and Charles De

Were were vividly depicted in his mind: but now they had seemed to fall into a species of obscurity—he beheld recent events as if through a mist: it was the looming gibbet and the yawning dungeon that were at present hideously vivid in their delineation to his mind's eye!

In a quarter of an hour the official residence of the Chief of the Police was reached; and the two agents alighted with their prisoner. The driver of the hackney-coach, having been paid his fare, departed, utterly ignorant who the captive was that he had conveyed thither, and not daring to ask any questions; for in Naples matters of this description are conducted with secrecy as well as with despatch.

The young Viscount was escorted into a waiting-room, where he was detained a few minutes, while a whispered message was sent up to the Chief of the Police, who was entertaining a party in his drawing-room. Immediately on receiving the announcement that was whispered in his ear—for all was secrecy and mystery within those walls as well as without—the Chief of the Police quitted his guests, repaired to his own private cabinet, seated himself at his desk, and ordered the prisoner to be brought into his presence. We may observe that the Chief of the Police was a short thin man, with a dark complexion, grey hair and whiskers, keen black eyes, and deep furrows upon his brow. These were however the effect of strong passions rather than of age; for his years did not much exceed fifty.—The portraiture will no doubt be recognised by every one who has happened to sojourn awhile at Naples.

Into the presence of this functionary was the Viscount Silvio conducted by the two agents who had captured him. There was no noise, no ceremony. One or two domestics whom they met in the passages leading to the private cabinet, passed by in silence, and did not so much as fling a look of curiosity, much less ask a question. They were accustomed to such scenes, and knew that they were not to be pried into.

Silvio took off his hat in token of respect for the Chief of the Police: but his demeanour was otherwise coldly stern, with a tincture of haughty defiance.

"Viscount Silvio Camerino," said the Chief of the Police, in the grave sententious style of Ministerial authority, "implicated in the treasonable conspiracy which was discovered on the 5th of January of the present year, 1843, what have you to say wherefore you should not be at once consigned to prison to await your trial on those charges?"

"I have nothing to say," responded Silvio coldly.

"Search his person," was the mandate now given by the Minister of Police.

Silvio submitted to a process against which he knew it would be useless to resist: but no weapon was found upon him, nor were any documents of the slightest consequence discovered.

"Leave the prisoner alone with me," said the Chief of the Police: and the two agents forthwith left the cabinet. "They remain in the passage outside," added the Minister, thus intimating to the prisoner that it would be futile for him to attempt any violence or to aim at an escape.

Silvio bowed haughtily, as if to imply that he felt himself to be in the functionary's power and should remain in a forced quiescence accordingly.

"You are very young, my lord," resumed the Chief of the Police, "to find yourself thus seriously compromised: for you cannot be ignorant of the consequences?"

"When men undertake certain things, my lord," replied Silvio, "they must be prepared for all eventualities."

"But these are serious in the present case," continued the Minister, fixing his dark eyes keenly upon the Viscount. "The punishment of treason may be the scaffold, and cannot be less than imprisonment to perpetuity!"

The suspicion had arisen in Silvio's mind that the Minister was thus addressing him with some ulterior object, and not simply in complaisance with official forms. Moreover the idea seemed to be corroborated by the circumstance of the dismissal of the two agents from the room. Silvio therefore said in a more urbane tone than he had hitherto adopted, "When I informed your Excellency that I was prepared to meet the consequences of my offence, it was under the impression that they were inevitable. But I have not enjoyed life so long, nor do I hold freedom so lightly, as to renounce the hope of saving the former and regaining the latter, if such hope may be tolerated."

The Minister again looked very hard in Silvio's face; and after a pause, he said, as if in a commiserating tone, "It were indeed a pity if one so young, with so many worldly advantages, and who might shine in society with such effect, should be suddenly cut off from the sphere in which he ought to flourish!"

"In one word, my lord," asked Silvio, "is there a means through which I could be restored to that sphere from which I confess that with much regret I have been alienated?"

"There is always a means," responded the Chief of the Police, with a hypocritical expression of countenance, "by which penitence can be displayed. You say that you regret having been led into treasonable practices against his Majesty's sacred person? This regret evidences contrition—contrition leads to atonement—and atonement may be followed by pardon."

"If your Excellency be mercifully inclined towards me," said the Viscount, "my eternal gratitude—"

"Gratitude must be shown by deeds as well as words. Answer me, Viscount Silvio! Were you not present at the very last meeting of the chiefs of the conspirators on the night of the 5th of January?"

"I was," replied Silvio, his heart now palpitating with hope as each successive word which fell from the lips of the Minister seemed to be drawing nearer to the point whereat the terms would be specified on which the young nobleman might save his life and regain his liberty.

"You were present at that meeting," continued the Chief of the Police: "you can therefore recollect the names of all the rest who were present? and you can perhaps furnish an outline of the speeches that were delivered on the occasion?"

"All this I could do," rejoined Silvio. "But, ah—"



"Well, to be sure," said the Minister coolly, "your father was amongst them. But he who wishes to save himself by displaying contrition and making atonement, must forget all the ties of kinship—or rather he must sacrifice them!"

"True!" said Silvio: and yet he shuddered as he thus corroborated the Minister's sophisticated aphorism.

"And are you prepared to make this sacrifice, even in respect to your own father, for the sake of life and liberty?" demanded the wily official.

To die ignominiously and prematurely was a terrible idea: to languish out the rest of existence in a loathsome dungeon was scarcely less horrible; and the Viscount, after a few moments of strong internal struggling, said with the firmness of a desperate resolve, "I am prepared to make any sacrifice!"

"Look here!" said the Minister of Police, taking from a drawer a file of official documents, held to-

gether by a piece of red tape at one corner. "Cast your eye over these pages!"

Silvio did so; and he found that the documents contained all the information to which the Minister had alluded,—the names of the personages present at the last meeting of the conspirators on the 5th of January, and an outline of the speeches delivered on the occasion. The young nobleman's heart sank within him—a cruel sense of disappointment smote him—but the next instant he was inspired with a feeling of indignation, as he turned his flashing eyes upon the Chief of the Police.

"Softly my lord!" said this functionary, evidently reading what was passing in Silvio's mind: "be not angry—lose not your temper! What I have already said and done was only intended to try you. A moment's reflection might have convinced you that I already long ago possessed the information mentioned, and that therefore I could not require it from your lips."

"Then what do you mean? and what am I to understand, my lord," inquired Silvio, his heart again palpitating under the influence of hope, with which however was blended the fluttering of suspense.

"Listen, Viscount! You are now assured me that you are prepared to make every sacrifice, even that of your own father. Did you not?"

After a moment's hesitation, Silvio answered, "I did."

"Tis well!—let us understand each other rightly as we go on:"—then suddenly fixing his keen eyes upon the young nobleman, the Minister said with startling abruptness, "Your father is in Naples!"

Completely taken by surprise and thrown off his guard, it is not to be wondered if Silvio betrayed by his looks that the Minister was right.

"I knew it!" this functionary instantaneously went on to say. "But I hesitate not to confess that though my agents for a moment obtained scent of him, they lost it—and they have since remained utterly at fault. The capture of the Count of Camerino is more important to the King's Government than that of the Viscount Camerino. Now do you understand me? and are we to understand each other?"

Silvio had already plunged so deeply into crime, alike in deed and in intention, that he speedily recovered from the shock which the Minister's words for a moment occasioned him; and he investigated the subject with a villain's calculating calmness.

"If the Count of Camerino," he said, "were betrayed into your hands—and if he knew that I, his son, had betrayed him—he would disinherit me of all his possessions and estates. Of what use, therefore, were it for me to go forth into the world a beggar? Better to perish on the scaffold or exist a captive in a dungeon!"

"The Count of Camerino," replied the Minister, "need never know that his son betrayed him."

"But look you, my lord," continued Silvio, "I have done something—no matter what—which my father stands upon the brink of discovering, even if by this time he have not discovered it! This fact alone will induce him to disinherit me. Therefore, I shall still go forth into the world a beggar!"

"Think you that your father has already made a will to the effect of disinheriting you?" inquired the Minister.

"No—assuredly not!" answered Silvio.

"Then from the instant that his arrest shall be effected," responded the Chief of the Police, "he can have no power to make a will. You therefore will remain heir-at-law."

"Ah! is it so?" ejaculated Silvio, unable to conceal his joy at the idea of inheriting the paternal estates in the face of any discovery that his father might make with reference to his past iniquities.

"It is so," said the Minister; "and I swear to you that every facility which the law can afford shall be granted——"

"But my father's estates are in Tuscany," interjected Silvio: "he has but comparatively a small property in Naples!"

"So much the better," replied the Minister. "You have never been attainted with treason in

the Tuscan dominions: your accession to the estates will be prompt and easy."

"Yet there is one more objection," observed Silvio, with a deep sigh; "and I fear that it is fatal. My father has not been attainted with treason in Tuscany; and therefore any will which he may make even though he be an outlaw in Naples, will hold good in Tuscany."

"Ah, my lord!" said the Minister, "you seem to think that we can only do things by halves: but I will teach you different. What if your father were utterly debarr'd from the use of writing materials?—or what if any will which he might succeed in making, were torn up and thrust into the fire? Am not I Chief of the Police?—is there any prisoner in his Majesty's dominions who can retain about his person the smallest scrap of paper if it suits me to have it in my own possession?—Know you not that the moment a man enters a prison, it is the same as entering a sepulchre, if I so will it? In short, my lord, all these difficulties you have started are the veriest trifles; and I assure you that in return for the service required at your hands, there shall be the recompense which I see that you require. The King's free pardon, under his own sign-manual, shall be at once placed in your possession when the deed is accomplished."

There was a moment's strong internal struggle on the part of Silvio; and then he said, "Procure the pardon, my lord—let me see it—let me know that I shall at least be rewarded for the tremendous sacrifice required of me, and that sacrifice shall be made!"

"Ah!" said the Chief of the Police, the colour for an instant flushing his dark-complexioned countenance; "then you mistrust me—you think that I shall play you false—that I shall avail myself of your services and neglect to give the recompense——"

Silvio looked the Minister full in the face; and said, "You and I, my lord, are about to play a game which neither of us could bear to regard with patience if the slightest spark of humanity lingered in our souls! You are enticing me to the betrayal of a father; and from my lips the fatal assent has already gone forth! I have not the courage to recall it. But what our opinion must be of each other you know as well as I. Do we not stand in the relationship of two villains——"

"Viscount Silvio of Camerino," interrupted the Chief of the Police, "this is language which I can only pardon by making allowances for the exciting circumstances in which you are placed. Let us however spare unnecessary verbiage. The bargain is already made, because I assent to your proposition. It is however now too late to procure the document which you demand until the morning. The full and free pardon must emanate from the office of the Minister of the Interior, and must receive the King's signature. You will therefore be compelled to pass the night beneath this roof. Yet every attention shall be shown you; and you shall be treated as my guest, with this difference only—that every precaution will be taken to prevent your escape. You will therefore do well not to attempt it."

"Answer me one question, my lord!" said Silvio. "Will my imprisonment here be kept

altogether secret?—will the issue of a pardon be a secret? In a word, can everything be so well managed that my father may not know and the world may never suspect that it is I, the Viscount of Camerico, who have perpetrated this awful crime?"

"The secret is veritably in your own keeping," answered the Chief of the Police; "because if you breathe not a sentence thereof to a single soul, no other lips will give publicity unto it."

"Then be it all as your Excellency has proposed," rejoined Silvio.

"But it is for me to ask a question in my turn," said the Chief of the Police; "and if you wish the bargain to be kept, you will see the necessity of replying in truthfulness to this question."

"Speak, my lord," said the Viscount.

"You are about to remain within these walls, a close prisoner, for perhaps twelve hours—more or less. Will your disappearance excite any suspicion?—will your father miss you during the interval?—in short, will the very circumstance of this disappearance cause him to suspect that you are captured, and by alarming him on account of his own safety, induce him to flee?"

"No," replied the Viscount of Camerico: "it was understood that I should not see my father again until to-morrow evening; and in no other respect can my disappearance for a few hours engender the slightest suspicion at all calculated to war our projects."

"'Tis well," said the Chief of the Police. "And now everything is perfectly understood between us. Have the kindness to remain here for a few moments."

The Minister, having thus spoken, issued from his cabinet, closing the door behind him. Silvio stood in front of the desk, his arms folded across his chest—his countenance bent downward with an expression of sullen gloomy desperation. Not many moments however had elapsed since he was thus left alone, when a curtain at the further extremity of the cabinet was pushed aside, and one of the most beautiful female faces that Silvio had ever in his life seen, peeped into the room; for that curtain concealed a private door which opened noiselessly upon its hinges. The charming countenance was however instantaneously withdrawn; for the young lady was evidently startled either on beholding some one there at all, or else at perceiving a different person than the one whom she expected to find. The curtain fell into its place; and the lovely vision vanished from Silvio's view.

A minute afterwards the Chief of the Police re-entered the cabinet, followed by a footman in livery.

"My two agents are gone, my lord," he said, thus addressing the Viscount in a whispering voice; "and the seal of secrecy rests upon their lips. Have the kindness to accompany this servant, who is placed at your lordship's orders."

Silvio bowed and followed the domestic from the cabinet—not by the curtained door, but by the one which had previously given him admission. The Minister bowed coldly in acknowledgment of the still colder salute on the Viscount's part. The young nobleman was led by the footman along a passage, where they met no one, into a handsomely furnished sitting-apartment, with a bed-chamber communicating. Wax-lights were burning upon

the table, where there was also a tray covered with a variety of refreshments. It was evident that all these preparations had been made on the young nobleman's account.

"I hope you will be satisfied with these apartments, Signor," said the footman, thus addressing Silvio as if he were a civilian—thereby proving that he either really did not know who he was, or else had been instructed not to know him. "The view is certainly not very pleasing; but as I understand that you are not likely to pass more than the night within these walls, it signifies little."

Thus speaking, the footman opened one of the casements; and Silvio mechanically looked out,—this being indeed the purpose for which the domestic's remarks were made. The windows of the two rooms, which were on the first floor, looked upon a small court-yard entirely surrounded by the high buildings forming the Prefecture of Police; and to and fro on the pavement of that yard a sentinel was pacing, the moonlight gleaming on the point of his fixed bayonet.

"As it is perfectly necessary to retain prisoners here for a few hours," said the footman, still speaking in the same conversational yet respectful manner as before, "the presence of a sentinel with loaded musket is only a wise precaution; for it is not always that we have to deal with a gentleman like you, Signor."

Silvio made no response: and the domestic closed the casement, satisfied at having in as delicate a manner as possible shown the captive the madness of attempting an escape.

"Do you require anything more, Signor?" asked the footman, glancing at the tray upon the table to assure himself that everything requisite for a good supper was there provided.

"Nothing," answered the Viscount, without so much as flinging another regard upon those preparations.

The footman bowed and withdrew, closing the door behind him. No sound was heard of either key turning in the lock or of bolt being shot into its socket; yet Silvio knew full well that even if such precautions as these had not been taken to ensure his safe custody, it was only because they were rendered needless by the existence of other barriers against an escape. He flung himself upon a seat and plunged into his gloomy reflections.

"Now," he thought within himself, "am I more than ever a villain!—a villain of the deepest dye! Not contented with being the seducer of my father's wife, I have agreed to betray that unfortunate sire of mine to the scaffold! Am I not a monster? Just heaven! does thy vengeance sleep while such deeds as these are done? Hast thou no lightnings wherewith to blast the parricide?—hast thou no thunders wherewith to strike him down ere the fulness of his iniquity be consummated? Oh! I dare not lift my hand to my brow—for something is burning there—and I dread lest my fingers should encounter the brand of Cain thereupon! Wretch, wretch that I am! is there no power of retreating? can I not yet repent and make atonement?"

But this paroxysm of anguish passed away—or, we should rather say, was absorbed in the intense selfishness of the young man's nature, which again asserted its empire. He persuaded himself that he had gone too far to retreat, and that the

step he had promised to take was the only one which could possibly secure to him the paternal estates, and save him from becoming an outcast, a wanderer, and a beggar upon the face of the earth.

He had started from his seat in the midst of that peroxysm: he now resumed it—and perceiving the wine upon the table, he filled a large glass to the brim. The contents hissed as they were poured down his parched throat,—hissed as if passing over red-hot iron! Then he again plunged into meditation: but he was now exerting all his powers of sophistry to persuade himself that he was adopting the only course which circumstances had left open. When the guilty mind is thus bent on the consummation of its iniquity, it is only, alas! too easy to conjure up arguments to impel it in its career and to harden it while pursuing that path. So was it now with the Viscount of Camerino.

An hour passed: he looked at his watch—it was close upon ten o'clock. He had not the slightest inclination to retire to rest. Sleep? no!—hardened though his heart were, to slumber was impossible. How was he to pass the long dreary night? The fire which had been burning brightly in the grate when he was first shown to that room, was now extinguishing: but there was an ample supply of fuel—and Silvio piled it half-way up the chimney, for he needed every accessory to give cheerfulness to the scene and to dispel the cold which had gathered around his heart. He drank another deep draught of wine: he paced to and fro in the room. Ah! there were books upon a shelf. He examined them:—there were novels, romances, poems, and historical works. He took down a volume, but he could not settle himself to read it. He passed into the bed-chamber—he threw himself upon the couch: he was restless—he could not remain there. He rose, and returned to the sitting-room: the monotonous tread of the sentinel in the court-yard below was the only sound which broke the silence that environed him. In this silence there was something awful. Suddenly he was seized with curiosity to ascertain whether the door of the apartment was really fastened. Gently he tried it; and he found that it was. He went back to his seat; and as he sat gazing upon the fire, he bethought himself of the beautiful face which he had seen peep from behind the curtain in the Minister's cabinet. Who could the lady be? She was young, and, as we have said, exceedingly handsome. Perhaps the Minister's daughter? Silvio wondered whether, if this were the case, she ever took compassion upon the prisoners who might be temporarily retained within those walls, or whether her heart partook of the hardness of her father's?

In order that the reader may properly understand the incident which we are about to describe, we must explain that Silvio was now seated exactly in front of the fire, at a distance of about half-a-dozen paces from it. On each side of the projecting chimney there was a recess:—one of these recesses contained some article of furniture: in the other there was nothing. Silvio was thinking of the beautiful countenance he had seen for an instant in the Minister's cabinet—his eyes were riveted upon the fire: but something—perhaps a slight sound—perhaps a partial glimpse of the ob-

ject that was appearing—caused him to raise his regards abruptly towards that empty recess. He sprang up from his seat: the beautiful countenance was there before him!

That recess contained a private door so admirably fitted into its setting that when it was shut no sign of its existence was visible to any one within that room. Now that door stood open; and a young lady, elegantly dressed, appeared upon the threshold. That face, with its luminous black eyes—its red lips—and shaded by floating masses of raven hair, was the same that was already hovering in his memory. She made a sign for him to be silent, and then beckoned him to follow her. He obeyed in a species of rapturous bewilderment as to what all this could be,—a bewilderment so great that it absorbed all the painful ideas that had been recently occupying him. That secret door communicated with an adjoining well-furnished apartment, at the extremity of which there was another secret door: and then there was another handsomely appointed room. There the lady indicated a seat; and placing herself on an ottoman close by, she looked bashfully at Silvio as if half afraid of what she had done. As she had led the way into that room, he was struck by the faultless symmetry of her somewhat voluptuously rounded form: he caught a glimpse of a pair of admirably modelled ankles; and as her arms were bare to the shoulders, he failed not to observe that they also were of fine sculptural proportions. Altogether she was a being on whom in any circumstances it was impossible to gaze without a feeling of rapture: while the adventure itself was full well calculated to excite the liveliest interest in the soul of the young nobleman. Ginevra was exquisitely beautiful; but she was not so handsome as the lady in whose presence he now found himself.

Addressing him in French, she said, "Do you speak this language?"

"I do," he responded—for indeed he spoke it fluently. "You are not, then, an Italian lady?" he added, wondering who she could possibly be; for of course he was now convinced that she was not the Minister's daughter.

"No—I am not an Italian," she replied; "and you who speak French better than I, must have seen also that I am not a native of France. No matter what my country is—I am a stranger—a foreigner."

"And yet, beautiful lady," said Silvio, "you have taken compassion on the unfortunate Italian captive!"

She blushed—hesitated for a moment—and then said, "Yes, I have taken compassion upon you; for without knowing of what you are accused—without even being aware of a single particular regarding you—I thought it cruel that one so young should already be acquainted with misfortunes!"

"A thousand thanks, lady, for this sympathy which you demonstrate towards me!" and Silvio seized her hand which he pressed rapturously for a moment—but the next instant it was withdrawn. "Who are you? tell me who you are!—for in a place which one might fancy only to be peopled with demons in a human form, it is as marvellous as it is delightful to encounter an angel-presence!"

The lady smiled and blushed as she said, "I have already told you that I am a native of a foreign far-off land; and you may know me by the name of Ciprina. Precisely one week have I been within these walls; and I pant for my liberty!"

"What, then, lady!" exclaimed Silvio in astonishment, "are you also a prisoner? And yet you are acquainted with these secret doors—you are initiated in the mysteries of this prison-house——"

"You see that it is so," rejoined Ciprina.

"The name you bear is Italian," cried Silvio, still wrapped in astonishment; "but in one sense does it most admirably become you—for it is the name of Venus the Goddess of Beauty!"

"Yet deem not," said Ciprina hastily, "that to my own vanity or conceit am I indebted for this name: it was bestowed by him who caused me to be brought hither."

"And who was he?" asked Silvio, while he still continued to gaze with rapture upon the beautiful creature before him. "Was it——"

"Of that no matter—at least for the present," she answered. "Let us speak of yourself. Tell me who you are, and of everything that concerns you."

At that moment a sudden suspicion flashed into the mind of the Viscount of Camerino. He knew with what subtle, stealthy, insidious agencies the purposes of the Neapolitan police were often worked out: in the circumstances of his own position and that of his father he had already experienced the most signal proof of the unscrupulous means thus adopted. What if this lady were a spy employing her siren wiles to fathom the secrets of his soul, and to ascertain for the Minister the nature of the thoughts that he might now harbour in respect to the compact he had made and the pledge he had given? All the mistrust which was thus suddenly excited in his mind, was betrayed by his countenance as he gazed upon the beautiful face before him. Ciprina instantaneously comprehended what was thus passing in his thoughts—for her cheeks flushed with a sudden indignation; and rising from her seat, she said, "Return, sir, to your own apartment—forget the indiscretion which I have committed—and if you be a man of honour, as I at first hoped and believed that you were, you will spare me the consequences that would probably ensue from a betrayal of this proceeding on my part!"

Silvio fell at her feet entreating her pardon.

"Forgive me, beautiful Ciprina!" he said; "forgive me for the moment's suspicion with which I have so foully wronged you! But when a man enters within the walls of this edifice, his entire nature seems to change—he grows mistrustful of every one—and if an angel were to present herself, as it now happens to me, he would for an instant dread lest it were a celestial shape worn only to conceal the demon heart within!"

"Rise, sir—rise," said Ciprina, now speaking more kindly. "I make allowances for you—and I forgive you."

As Silvio rose from his suppliant posture and resumed his seat, the lady took her own place upon the ottoman, saying, "It was indeed only too natural that you should be mistrustful of anything which happens within these walls. I see that in-

stead of in the first instance seeking explanations from your lips, I ought to have commenced them on my own account in order to inspire you with confidence. But yet there is one question you must answer me. Tell me—of what are you accused? for I cannot bring myself to think that it is of aught that you need blush to own."

"No, lady," responded Silvio: "it is a political charge that is brought against me."

"I thought so," she exclaimed; "and hence the observance of so much mystery! Believe me, sir, if such had not from the very first been my impression, I should not have displayed any sympathy on your behalf—I should not have sought you in your room—nor would you be here in conversation with me. But now let me say a few words in reference to myself."

"Beautiful Ciprina," exclaimed Silvio, "if your object be to inspire me with confidence it is unnecessary; for Oh! I already deeply, deeply regret the mistrust which for an instant I displayed. But if you choose to satisfy the fervent and sympathizing curiosity which I feel to learn how you, fair stranger, can be a prisoner within the walls of the Neapolitan Prefecture, I shall listen with the profoundest interest."

"Listen then," she responded, with a sweet smile, which revealed her pearly teeth. "It was precisely a week ago that I was about to leave Naples. For certain reasons, which I cannot now pause to explain, it suited me to travel alone. Having taken my seat in the postchaise which I thought was to bear me away from this city, I was thinking of a variety of subjects, when the equipage all of a sudden diverged from the street which it was threading, and turned in under a gloomy archway. It entered a court-yard; and the gates of the archway were closed. You may easily imagine that I was frightened by this circumstance: it seemed all the more alarming because it was so unaccountable. The door of the chaise was quickly opened, and an elderly gentleman courteously requested me to alight. I obeyed—for I felt that I was completely in the power of those mysterious hands into which I had fallen, or into which I was treacherously betrayed. The gentleman desired me to follow him; and he led the way up to this apartment. Here he announced himself to be the Chief of the Police. Conscious of having done nothing to entangle me in the meshes of the law, I took courage and demanded by what right my liberty was thus violated. The Chief of the Police speedily explained himself: he used but little circumlocution—he came quickly to the point. He had seen me before—he had become enamoured of me: as Chief of the Police he knew as much as it was possible to be known in Naples concerning me; and as a matter of course he was cognizant of the fact that my passport was countersigned for departure from Naples. Determined to have an interview with me, he had adopted the means to procure it which I have already explained: for it appears, sir," added Ciprine with a smile, "that persons in authority may now do anything in this country, whereas I can assure you that in my own native land it is very different!"

"And what followed, beautiful lady?" asked the Viscount.

"The Chief of the Police proceeded in a very

business-like style," resumed Ciprina, "to make me aware of the position in which I now found myself placed by the whim which he had conceived or the passion which had inflamed him—for it would be a desecration of the name of *love* to use the term in this sense. He asked me if I would agree to live with him as his mistress——"

"Ah, the monster!" ejaculated Silvio: "he dared thus avail himself of his power and authority to insult you?"

"Interrupt me not," said Ciprina, with another good-tempered smile; "or I shall never make an end of my narrative. Yes—such was the proposal which emanated from the lips of the Minister of Police. I can assure you that I was no longer timid and frightened: I saw precisely how I was situated; and I calmly inquired what he would do if I rejected his overture? It was still as if he were dealing with a mere matter of police-business that he answered me. He said that in the unsettled state of Neapolitan affairs it was absolutely necessary to keep a vigilant eye upon all foreigners, male and female, who visited the kingdom without any apparent object: he significantly hinted that he, the Chief of the Police, was vested with full discretionary powers in such matters, and that the doors of the most loathsome dungeons opened to receive captives at his bidding. But on the other hand he was equally precise in his assurances of kindness and liberality if my answer should prove favourable. What could I do, sir? You see that I am dealing very frankly with you—I am giving you my confidence that I may in turn receive yours: and the truth is that I became the mistress of the Chief of the Police!"

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Silvio, who could scarcely in his own mind realize the idea that one so young and exceedingly beautiful could have thrown herself into the arms of that ill-looking man of fifty years of age.

"It has happened!" responded Ciprina. "Do not blame me—do not let me suffer in your estimation: I yielded only to the necessity of my position. Think you that it was better to accept the alternative of a loathsome dungeon or to yield to the overtures of that man? Really I had not the courage to adopt the former; and therefore I chose the latter alternative. As I informed you at the outset, the Minister bestowed upon me the Christian name by which I have desired you to address me; for after everything which has happened, my own real name—the name which I bore in my native land and which was mine when I set foot on the Italian shore—must be for ever abandoned! Behold me installed beneath this roof—the occupant of a sumptuous suite of apartments—with troops of domestics to do my bidding in all things except to give me freedom——"

"And why does the Minister retain you a captive?" asked Silvio.

"Because I have as yet been but one week beneath this roof," answered Ciprina: "I came not hither of my own accord—I accepted not my position willingly—and therefore the Minister rightly conceives that I should avail myself of the first opportunity to flee hence. Perhaps he supposes that by detaining me for a few weeks or a few months in my gilded cage—by surrounding me with luxuries—by lavishing upon me the costliest gifts—and by means of every art with which

men invariably seek to ensure the fidelity of their mistresses who are younger than themselves, I shall become reconciled to my position and shall willingly occupy a town mansion or a suburban villa without the least inclination to flee away from the protection which has been forced upon me. But the Minister is mistaken! I loathe this gilded cage: I pant for freedom. Already have I revolved a thousand plans in my mind: at length I have settled my thoughts upon one which seems feasible—nay more, it is even certain of success! But in its execution I require an assistant; and if your own circumstances be such——"

"Tell me, beautiful Ciprina," said Silvio, "how came you to be acquainted with the mysteries of these concealed doors?—for surely the Minister himself would not initiate you into such secrets."

"No," rejoined Ciprina: and then she added with an arch smile, "But what if the maid who has been assigned to my special personal service, has conceived an affection for me—what if she be devoted to my interests——"

"Ah! this I can easily comprehend," ejaculated Silvio: "for it is impossible to be even a few minutes in your society without experiencing an interest in your behalf!"

"Fidelia—this maid of whom I speak," continued Ciprina, "is the daughter of one of the officials belonging to the establishment. She has dwelt beneath this roof almost from her infancy; and she is acquainted with many of its mysteries. There are secret doors for various purposes. For instance, if it suit the Chief of the Police to visit a particular prisoner under circumstances of the utmost secrecy, the turnkey need not be appealed to to open the door of the room in which such captive is confined: the Minister has the private door whereby he can seek access to the interior of that apartment. And then too for all purposes of espial—and likewise to listen to the conversation of two or more captives who may be placed together in the same room—or for the more convenient removal of a prisoner in the dead of night to the carriage in the court-yard which is to convey him to a fortress where eternal captivity is to be his doom and where he is to be consigned to an almost utter oblivion,—in a word, for all the thousand purposes which have to be answered in this dread establishment, you can easily conjecture how secret doors, secret passages, and secret staircases are absolutely necessary! Fidelia is acquainted with many of these mysteries; and she has communicated them to me. You perceive," continued Ciprina, with another of her sweet smiles, "that this knowledge has already proved useful, inasmuch as it has enabled me to communicate with you; and if, as I presume, you would avail yourself of the chances of escape—for what prisoner would refuse them?—this knowledge of mine may be still further utilised."

"Was it by accident, beautiful Ciprina," asked Silvio, "that you peeped into the Minister's cabinet ere now?"

"Entirely by accident," she responded. "I am permitted access thither at any time that I may wish to communicate with his lordship. He entertains company this evening in his state-saloon; but he informed me that there would be an hour when he would withdraw from his guests to glance

an eye over whatsoever despatches might demand his immediate attention. Now, I will tell you candidly, sir, that for the last day or two I have been playing a game of dissimulation with the Minister. I have pretended to be touched by his attentions—to be moved by his endeavours to render my position a happy one—in short, I have suffered him to believe that it is quite possible I can love him. Keen, shrewd, suspicious, and mistrustful as on all other points he may be, yet in this one sense he is like every other man—credulous in respect to the bland assurances which are breathed from woman's lips. I need hardly inform you that this game of dissimulation I had entered upon in the hope of abridging the term of my captivity, and of inducing him to provide me with an abode outside the walls and where I might be my own mistress. But I am extending my narrative to a much greater length than I had at first anticipated—”

“You were about to tell me, beautiful Ciprina,” said Silvio, “how it happened that you suddenly passed into the cabinet?”

“Ah! true,” exclaimed the lady. “Well then, as I have already said, the Minister had informed me that he should be compelled to leave his state-saloons for an hour and seek that cabinet. I understood his meaning: it was an intimation that he would take it kind on my part, and regard it as a proof of affection, if I would bestow a few minutes of my society upon him there, as a relaxation for him amidst the cares of business as well as an agreeable change from the formal ceremonies of his brilliant saloons. True, therefore, to my plan of dissimulation, I repaired to the cabinet: I was entering it when I beheld a stranger there. That stranger was yourself. Instantaneously withdrew: but I will confess that on beholding one so young I was smitten with a feeling of interest—I wondered what offence could be laid to your charge—and I shuddered as I reflected that the cabinet where I beheld you, was too often the avenue to a fortress and a dungeon!”

“But how did you know that I was a prisoner?” inquired Silvio.

“I suspected it from the attitude in which you were standing, and from the look of mingled gloom and despair which I surprised upon your countenance at the moment you glanced up towards me. On returning to my apartment, I bade Fidelia make inquiries: and she did so. She could however ascertain nothing beyond the fact that you were a prisoner, and that you had been consigned to a particular room: nothing more could she learn—no, not even your name! I deliberated with myself whether I should yield to the feeling of interest which had taken possession of me:—and—you know the result. I have now given you my complete confidence—I have disguised nothing from you—not even my shame!”

The reader may have seen with what feelings Silvio listened to this narrative. He was at first indignant at the idea that the Chief of Police should avail himself of his power and authority to make certain overtures to the lady, and by terrorism seek to enforce them: but he had expected to hear from her lips that she had rejected them with scorn, and that she was punished by captivity until she should yield an assent. When, however

he was informed that she had at once succumbed and that she was the mistress of the Minister, all his original suspicions flamed up anew in his mind. It was under the influence of those suspicions that he had so closely questioned her upon all the various points of her conduct; and the answers were readily given to his queries. Indeed, there was altogether a sincerity about Ciprina which banished those suspicions; and moreover, as Silvio reflected upon everything that he heard, he said to himself, “The very candour of her avowal that she has become the Minister's mistress, is a proof that she is not dealing falsely with me! If she were merely acting as his spy, she would have pursued a different course—she would affect rage, hatred, and bitterness towards him, in order the more completely to throw me off my guard: whereas her language has been moderate, and she has assumed no unnecessary vehemence nor passion.”

The result, therefore, of Ciprina's revelations was to win the entire confidence of the Viscount of Camerino. But now he asked himself whether his acquaintance with this lady would prove of any service to him? Did he wish to escape? or would he rather remain for a few hours longer a captive within those walls, and emancipate himself on the morrow by the fulfilment of his bargain with the Chief of the Police? He hastily reviewed the circumstances of his position and the various influences which he deemed it requisite to envisage, to calculate, and to study.

“If I remain,” he said to himself, “I must fulfil my compact and betray my father to the scaffold. But in so doing I shall ensure for myself the heritage of his estates. On the other hand, if through Ciprina's assistance I escape, I shall avoid the fearful crime of parricide—though I may be leaving my sire in a position to discover the fearful secret of my illicit amour with Ginevra, the result of which discovery would be my inevitable disinheritance. But Ah! if I were to escape, might I not warn my father of the fact that his presence in Naples is known? would he not at once flee?—and then, if Ginevra, yielding to De Vere's advice, would immure herself for the remainder of her existence in a convent, the dread secret of my guilt might escape detection on the part of my sire! At all events it were better for me to avoid the alternative of the hideous crime which was ere now contemplated, and leave all the rest to chance!”

Such was the conclusion to which Silvio came after a few moments of reflection. Ciprina saw that he was meditating; but very far was she from comprehending the painful nature and exciting subject of his thoughts:—she fancied that he was revolving in his mind the explanations that he had received from her lips and the amount of confidence which he might repose in her.

“Beautiful lady,” he at length said, “I now owe you those avowals which your own, so generously and so freely made, reciprocally demand. I am the Viscount Silvio of Camerino: I was engaged in the great conspiracy which exploded at the commencement of the present year: I fled at the time, and my name was inserted in the list of political proscriptions. Recently I came to Naples in disguise, for certain purposes:—to night I was discovered and arrested. Show me the means of

escape—and I will faithfully succour you in carrying them out. Should we succeed, lady," he added, with a tender look, at the same time taking her hand, "you may command my lasting gratitude—my devotion—my love! What more can I say?"

"Nothing," answered Ciprina, with downcast eyes and with a blush mantling on her cheeks. "We will escape, Viscount!—but it cannot be until to-morrow night!"

"Not until to-morrow night?" echoed Silvio, a shade of disappointment suddenly coming over his countenance.

"No, it is impossible!" she rejoined, with an air of anxiety and concern. "But what is it that you fear? what do you apprehend? Think you that in the meantime the order for your removal may be issued?"

"It is this that I fear," answered Silvio: but after a few moments' reflection, he exclaimed, "Yet it is possible that I may be enabled to procure a delay! Certain proposals have been made to me——"

"For heaven's sake do whatever you can—strain every nerve," interjected Ciprina, "to procure this delay! You see how much depends upon it! There are arrangements to make—I must deliberate with Fidelia——"

"Are you well assured, lady, that she is not a traitress and a spy?—ere you confide that she will not betray you?" demanded the Viscount.

"I feel convinced that I can trust her! She has already agreed to assist me—for she has stipulated that I take her away with me. Her father is bareh and stern towards her—she loathes the gloomy existence which she habitually leads within these walls: in a word, Viscount, I can depend upon her sincerity. Let not this idea trouble you. Do you perform your part; and I will accomplish mine."

"Be it so, beautiful Ciprina!" rejoined Silvio. "I now hold myself entirely at your orders."

At this instant the door of the apartment opened; and from an adjoining ante-chamber, a young girl, who had been keeping watch there, emerged. She was about seventeen, and singularly beautiful. But the Viscount had not many moments to contemplate her; for her sudden appearance was a signal that he must retire to his own apartment. Ciprina hastily conducted him thither, opening the secret doors by some means which he could not discern; and as he crossed the threshold of his own room, she gave him her hand for a moment. He pressed it to his lips: the secret door then closed upon him—and he was once more alone in his prison apartment, feeling as if all that had taken place within the last hour was a dream from which he had just awakened.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE HUSBAND AND WIFE.

It was in the forenoon of the day following the incidents which we have been recording, that an individual of fine tall form, and wearing a priest's costume, entered the church which has been so frequently mentioned in recent chapters. He wore

a pair of green spectacles, and his hair was cut quite close. The service was already being performed: there was a small congregation present; and on one of the chairs in the front row, Ginevra was kneeling. The individual to whom we have just referred, satisfied himself by a glance that she was present; and with noiseless steps he proceeded to the vestuary. Here he found a young priest seated, reading some religious book: but he immediately rose as the visitor made his appearance. The young priest was Father Falconara.

"My lord," he said, with anxiety depicted in his countenance, "is it possible that you are really incurring these fearful risks? I could scarcely believe Nino Corso when he came to me this morning——"

"Nevertheless, my dear young friend," interrupted the Count of Camerino—for he indeed was the tall individual disguised in the ecclesiastical costume,—"you see that the faithful Nino did not deceive you: for I am here punctual to the appointment which through him I made with you. But look, and tell me—is not this disguise complete?"

Father Falconara had been already rapidly and anxiously surveying the Count of Camerino's appearance; and he said, "If Nino Corso had not told me in what disguise you were coming—and if this punctuality to the very instant had not proved that it was really you—moreover, if on crossing the threshold you had not at once made the secret sign,—I should have looked upon you as a stranger whom I had never seen before. The disguise is indeed complete!"

"I knew it was so," said the Count. "With whiskers, beard, and moustache shaven off—with my hair cut close—with these green spectacles—and in this priestly garb, I was assured by Nino that I might pass amongst my own most familiar friends without being recognised."

"But your object in Naples, my dear Count?" said Father Falconara; "is it in the desperate hope——"

"Whatever it be, my young friend," interrupted the Count, "I seek not again to involve you in any of the perils which you have once so narrowly escaped!"

An expression of joy appeared upon the naturally pale face and previously anxious countenance of the priest, as he fervently exclaimed, "Heaven be thanked! You know, my lord," he went on to say, "that when I was at the University, I and other students bound ourselves by a most solemn oath to obey the mandates of our political leaders; and I believe you will admit that in the conspiracy which so fatally exploded, I performed my duty. I was fortunate enough to remain undiscovered and unsuspected. But I have since meditated deeply and painfully upon all those things. I am still the fervid patriot that I ever was: but I feel that my position as an ecclesiastic and a minister of the Gospel is utterly incompatible with that of the member of a secret society——"

"And I tell you, my young friend," answered the Count of Camerino, "that I seek you not now for the purpose of enlisting your services in renewed struggles for the emancipation of our beloved Italy."

"Nevertheless, my lord," rejoined Father Falconara, "you must not deem me a recreant or a



backslider! My political faith is still as strong as my religious creed; but no man can serve two masters—and it is my duty to hold unto the latter alone! I have a deep and imperishable sense of all the obligations which I owe your lordship:—to you am I indebted for the bread which in my youthful years I ate, as well as for the education which prepared me for the priesthood——”

“Speak not of all this, my young friend!” said the Count. “Were you not the orphan son of my old patriot friend?—and when your father lay upon his death bed, did I not pledge myself to take charge of your welfare? No more therefore upon that point! It is no political service which I now demand of you; but there is another service which you can render me——”

“Name it, my lord!” said the young priest, with all the enthusiasm of a grateful heart; “and you shall see how readily I will perform it. But,

No. 35.—AGNES.

Oh! it grieves me to observe the look of care which is upon your countenance—that expression of suffering which has just swept over your features——”

“I have indeed suffered much,” responded the Count of Camerino, in a deep sombre voice,—“not merely for my country’s sake—not merely as an exile from my native land—but—otherwise, my young friend—in my domestic circumstances——”

“My lord, what mean you?” asked Falconara, with a look of the most unfeigned astonishment.

“Spare me the pain of explanations,” said the Count; “and suffer me to demand at your hands the service I require without entering into those particulars which will only probe the wounds that are still fresh and bleeding in my heart!”

The young priest gazed with the deepest sorrow upon the countenance of his benefactor: but he

spoke not—he prepared to listen in silence to whatever the nobleman might be about to communicate.

"It has come to my knowledge," proceeded the Count of Camerino, "that you will be presently summoned to the confessional to receive the avowals of sin from the lips of a penitent—"

"I have already received a note, my lord," replied Father Falconara, "from one in whom you are deeply interested, desiring me to attend in the confessional within a few minutes of the hour of noon: but it is utterly impossible that from *her* lips—"

"Yes—it is from *her* lips," interrupted the Count, with features indescribably sombre in their expression,—"yes, it is from the lips of Ginevra—"

"My lord?"—and the young priest stopped short, aghast and confounded.

"Now, now you know the secret of my sufferings!" exclaimed the nobleman: "you have fathomed the mystery of the horrible tortures which I am enduring! Oh! my young friend, blessed are you in the celibacy of the priesthood, to be exempt from the possibility of such fearful calamities as these! For what is more terrible than for a husband to know that he is dishonoured—"

"My lord?" again said the young priest, with the air of one who could not give credit to the evidence of his own ears.

"It is as I tell you," resumed the unhappy nobleman; "and you see before you the most miserable wretch in existence! But for heaven's sake drag me not into explanations—time is passing—the hour is approaching—"

"What—what, my lord, can I do?" asked Father Falconara, trembling from head to foot with distress at what he heard, for he dearly loved his benefactor.

"Every point save one in Ginevra's guilty career is known unto me," replied the Count hastily; "and that point must be cleared up. There is but one means—and that is through the confessional—"

Falconara started: for a few moments he became dreadfully perturbed—and he faltered forth, "No, no! this I cannot do. Anything but *that*, my lord! Immense though my obligations are towards you, yet the secrets of the confessional—"

"I ask you not to betray them, my young friend," replied the Count. "I know that they are sacred when confided to the bosom of a priest; and not for worlds would I ask you to violate that sanctity! But in this instance it is not to a priest that they are to be confided—"

"Oh! what mean you, my lord?" said the trembling Falconara. "I adjure you to relieve me from this state of suspense!"

"In one word," responded the Count, "suffer me to take your place at the confessional. This is the boon which I demand!"

The young priest was standing at the time that the request was thus put to him: but he suddenly sank down upon his chair, as if overwhelmed by feelings which struck him with the violence of a blow. He gazed with a strange vacant look upon the Count: for next to the betrayal of the secrets of the confessional, the deed that he was asked to perform was the most sacrilegious.

"You will do this, my young friend?" said the Count earnestly: "it is the only boon I shall ever ask you to grant! If you owe me any debt of gratitude, you will now be amply repaying it. Even though you be committing a sin, yet must you thus sin for the sake of friendship and gratitude! Yes—you must make this sacrifice on my account?"

"You gave me bread when without you I should have starved," murmured the young priest; "you became my friend when otherwise I should have been friendless—you gave me likewise the means of education which made me what I am! I owe you everything—it is my very life therefore which I owe you—and you may command me in all things! How would you have me act?"

"The guilty Ginevra will presently be in the confessional," said the Count: "proceed you thither—devise some pretext for not performing the holy ministrations—say that you are under a penance—say anything! You best know what excuse may be devised in order to introduce me as a priest in your place? This is what I ask of you."

Father Falconara glanced at a time-piece upon the mantel, and said, "The service is nearly over—the officiating priests will come hither to put off their robes. Go you, my lord, and walk in the shade of the aisle until I rejoin you. Everything shall be done as you command—But believe me—Oh! believe me, it is a very great sacrifice which I am making on your account!"

The nobleman wrung the young priest's hand and issued from the vestry. When Father Falconara was alone, he clasped his hands, while a despairing look flitted over his countenance; for he felt as if he were standing on the threshold of a sacrilegious crime. But composing his features as well as he was able, and summoning all his fortitude to his aid, he went out of the vestry. A glance showed him the form of the Count slowly proceeding amidst the gloom of the neighbouring aisle—for it was a dark sombre day at that Christmas season of the year. The service was just concluded—the congregation were quitting the church—the priests who had officiated were descending from the altar. Another glance showed Father Falconara the veiled form of Ginevra passing slowly towards the confessional; and it struck him that she staggered in her walk as if under the influence of the most harrowing sensations. Father Falconara purposely threw himself in the way of the two priests who were now approaching the vestry. They caught sight of the form in the clerical garb that was pacing in the gloomy aisle; and Father Falconara at once said, "He is a friend of mine—a holy priest belonging to a village in the neighbourhood."

The other two priests entered the vestry, put off their robes, and shortly afterwards quitted the church. Father Falconara breathed more freely when they were gone; and he advanced towards the confessional. Ginevra was kneeling in the proper place; and the young priest lowered the curtain in such a way as entirely to conceal the entrance of the confessional and to render it almost completely dark within. Taking his own place on the opposite side of the lattice-barrier that separated him from the penitent, he began speaking to her in the sense which the Count him-

self suggested. He said that bring under a penance enjoined him by the Dean for some little dereliction of duty of which he had been culpable, he was not in a condition to receive her confession nor to grant absolution. He went on to observe that he had engaged the services of a reverend pastor as a substitute; and he eulogized the character of the individual, Ginevra, whose mind was made up to confess her guilt that day and effect immediate arrangements for retiring into a convent, agreed to confess to the substitute. But she said to Father Falconara, "There is a boon that I had intended to solicit at your hands, but which it was not my purpose to explain until after my confession should have been made. Existing circumstances however force me to explain it now. It is this,—that you will consent to become the trustee for whatsoever little property I may be enabled to dispose of, and that you will apportion it according to the instructions I shall give. I am about to abandon the world and seek the holy retirement of a cloister. Half of the property to which I have alluded, I bequeath to the convent which I may thus enter:—in respect to the other portion I will give written instructions which shall be forwarded to you. Do you consent to fulfil the duties which I thus enjoin?"

"I consent," answered the young priest. "You may command my services to any extent that is consistent with my sacred position and my duties."

Ginevra expressed her gratitude; and Father Falconara issued forth from the confessional. Hastily rejoining the Count of Camerino, he gave him the Dominican gown in which to muffle himself, and which had a hood to draw over the head.

"Now go, my lord," he said; "and as you expect mercy in heaven for whatsoever offences you may have committed against its divine laws, I conjure you to have mercy upon your wife!"

The Count made no reply—but he proceeded towards the confessional; while the young priest returned into the vestry, in a half-stupified state of mind, as if he were labouring under some awful consternation.

Meanwhile the Count of Camerino had passed into the confessional, taking care that the curtain which he only disturbed for a moment, should completely close the entrance as he had found it. The hood of the Dominican garb was drawn so far over his face as to shade it altogether; and as we have before said, the interior of the confessional was itself involved in gloom. Thus, everything considered, it was impossible for Ginevra to discern, much less to recognise the countenance of the pretended priest—especially as if she looked at it at all, it would be through the lattice-work of the barrier.

There they were, the outraged husband and the guilty wife, close together—almost in contact—with naught but that barrier between them! And what a moment was it for the Count of Camerino! She whom he had loved so tenderly—whom through that very love he had raised from a comparatively obscure position to be the partner of his rank and wealth—she who had rewarded him with such perfidiousness—she, the guilty Ginevra, was there, with scarcely the interval of a foot between them! He could hear her sobs: but not more plainly

audible were they than the beatings of his own heart. He could likewise hear her heavy tears—drops falling upon the projecting ledge placed for the support of the hands when clasped in prayer. The main circumstances of her guilt he already knew: it was a name that he wanted—the name of him who had been the partner of her iniquity! It was not the intention of the Count to reveal himself to Ginevra upon the present occasion: but he required this name that he might wreak a terrific vengeance on the author of his dishonour—and afterwards it would be time enough to think how he would deal with his wife. Perhaps he would remain altogether passive in that respect until she should have sought a convent:—thither he might send a communication to the effect that he knew everything—and then he might leave her to the horrors of her remorse, or to the consolations of penitence for the remainder of her days.

Ginevra, little suspecting that her own injured, outraged husband was listening to the tale, began in a broken voice to make the confession of her guilt. She mentioned who she was; for she not merely presumed that Father Falconara had revealed this fact to him who was to be there as his substitute—but she likewise deemed it her duty to make her confession as perfect as possible, so that her own self martyrdom might be all the greater. She spoke in the highest terms of her husband—eulogized his character—praised the magnanimity of his disposition—and in that same self-martyrizing spirit exaggerated if possible his merits, so as to represent her own crime in all the blacker light. Then she proceeded to touch upon the delicate ground.

"Alas, holy father!" she said, "notwithstanding that I possessed this kind, this generous, this noble-minded husband—notwithstanding that I owed so immense a debt of gratitude to him who had raised me up from comparative obscurity and poverty to a position of rank and wealth—the evil spirit had strong hold upon me, and I set at naught all duties, all obligations! There was one—a young man of handsome person and fascinating address—a young man who possessed every quality calculated to win the female heart—"

"And that young man, daughter?" said the Count, in a low feigned voice, and addressing the penitent in the character of a holy father confessor: "who was he? what was his name?"

"Oh! how can I tell you?" moaned the unhappy lady; "for it is this that constitutes the horror of the crime that I have committed!"

"What mean you?" asked the Count, stricken with such feelings that he well-nigh forgot the necessity to maintain the disguise of his voice: for a vague and horrible suspicion had just smitten his mind—and yet he put it from him with a repelling violence, as a man would toss away a noxious reptile.

"I mean, holy father," rejoined the guilty Countess, "that my sin is of the deepest dye, because—because—No, no! I cannot tell you!"

"Speak, daughter—speak!" said the Count, in a low hoarse voice, the peculiarity of which failed to strike her only because she was so excruciated by her own feelings.

"I feel, holy father," she murmured, in a broken voice, "that I never, never can obtain absolution!"

—for the partner of my crime—Oh, spare me, holy father!"

"Speak, speak!" the low hoarse voice again said; and the breath was hot with the fever-beat which coming from the Count's throat, passed through the lattice-work.

"You will think me the vilest of wretches, holy father," faltered the miserable Countess, "when I name him—when I tell you who was the partner of my guilt—Silvio—my husband's own son!"

A cry of horror burst from the Count's lips; and Ginevra started up with a faint half-stifled shriek.

"My God, have mercy upon me!" moaned the wretched Count of Camerino, now speaking in his own natural voice; and then all was silent in that compartment of the confessional where he was.

But Ginevra, half-distracted—for she had only too well recognised that voice—rushed forth from her own compartment; and in the wild anguish of her mind she tore back the curtain. Her husband had fainted: the spectacles had fallen off—the cowl was thrown back from his head—she recognised his features: if there had been a doubt lingering in her mind, it was now horribly dispelled. She was about to throw herself at his feet and implore his pardon, forgetful that in that state of unconsciousness he was unable to accord it,—when suddenly impelled by another idea, she rushed in frenzy away from the spot. Along the aisle she sped: no stranger was in the church to behold her—and she issued forth from the sacred edifice. On the steps she met Charles De Vera.

The reader will recollect the promise which our young hero had made Silvio on the preceding evening, that he would see Ginevra on the morrow and enjoin her to retire to a convent. He had been detained by business at the Embassy until this moment: he was therefore later than he had intended to be. On beholding Ginevra rushing frantically down those steps, he was smitten with astonishment, and for a moment could not give utterance to a word. She recognised him—she stopped short—and with a look of unutterable despair she endeavoured to gasp forth something. But she could not:—the words stuck in her throat—she had not the power to give utterance to them.

"For heaven's sake, what is the meaning of this?" inquired Charles, at length recovering the faculty of his own speech: "what new calamity has occurred?"

"All, all is discovered!" Ginevra faltered forth. "There! there!"—and she pointed to the church-door: "my husband!"

She then hurried away, and was speedily lost to the view of our young hero, who was transfixed to the spot by the horror which that announcement had suddenly excited in him. But in a few moments he rushed into the church; and there he beheld Father Falconara sustaining in his arms a person whom he was dragging towards the vestry. The unhappy Count had already half-recovered his consciousness: he now wholly regained it—but the anguish of centuries had been left upon his features by the incidents of a few moments. Charles recognised him; and his looks showed Father Falconara that he was far from being a stranger to the events that were passing.

"This young gentleman is a friend!" said the Count, in a voice so altered, and Oh! so sombre, that it was scarcely recognisable as that of the nobleman; and the words that he spoke were addressed to Father Falconara.

The Count then moved towards the vestry, the young priest and Charles following in silence. When in that place, the Count said, "A short time back I considered myself the most miserable of men: but my position *then* was a perfect paradise to what it is *now*! You, Signor," turning towards De Vera—"can comprehend what I mean when I tell you that I have discovered everything. But where is that guilty woman?"

"I met her upon the church steps," replied Charles; "she sped frantically away—I fear that she will do herself a mischief!"

"My young friend," said the Count to Father Falconara—and he now spoke in a rapid and excited manner—"the discovery which has been made is horrible, horrible! But publicity must not be given to it! Speed you to the mansion—see the guilty Countess—tell her that as she has brought a hideous stigma upon the name which I gave her, the only atonement she can now make is to avoid attracting the world's gaze upon it! Tell her to carry the frightful secret with her to a convent! Go quick!—do everything that is needful to prevent the catastrophe! What the horrible secret is you will presently learn?"

Father Falconara issued from the vestry: the Count remained there alone with Charles De Vera.

"I do not wonder, Signor," said the wretched nobleman, "that you should last night have refused to breathe the name of him whom henceforth I can never again call my son: I respect that generosity of feeling which prompted you to keep the terrific secret! You have behaved admirably—nobly!—your conduct has been magnanimous to a degree! But now that the discovery is made, I beseech you to give me every particular—at least if any be yet unknown to me—in respect to the way you have been mixed up in these unfortunate affairs."

Charles De Vera saw no harm in complying to a certain extent with the Count's request. He therefore explained how the child had been originally confided to his keeping: but as he was anxious to avoid embittering the feelings of the unhappy father against the son, he suppressed everything which might have this effect—if indeed such an effect were now possible! Thus he did not state that it was through fear of the child being made away with by Silvio, that Ginevra had confided it to his keeping: but he gave a somewhat different complexion to this portion of the tale. Neither did he state how he had been enticed to the ruins of St. Nicholas, where his life was treacherously attempted by Silvio. All these details he generously suppressed. Becoming a questioner in his turn, he inquired how the Count had made the final discovery?—though from certain antecedent circumstances in respect to Silvio counterfeiting Father Falconara in the confessional, the youth already more than half-suspected the actual truth of the present occurrence. For he remembered that the Count was dressed as a priest, and at the time when he was being dragged by Father Falconara to the vestry the Dominican gown was still hanging about his form.

The nobleman briefly explained how Ginevra had visited Nino Coraso's lodging on the preceding evening, and how he had overheard her state to Benedetta her intention of confessing everything to the priest on the ensuing day. The Count revealed the remainder of the incident, as it is already known to the reader: but he earnestly besought Charles De Vere to keep the whole affair profoundly secret. A pledge to this effect was readily given by the generous youth; and then he said, "What will your lordship now do!—for Oh! I beseech you to remember that however guilty Silvio may be, he is nevertheless your son—your own flesh and blood!"

"I know it—alas, I know it!" replied the Count. "Generous young man! this appeal shall not be made to me in vain. A few minutes back I thought that I must kill my son—yes, ruthlessly slay him——"

Charles shuddered visibly, as he said, "No, no!—for God's sake, my lord, banish such horrible ideas from your mind!"

"They are already banished," answered the Count, with a solemn sincerity. "But still such stupendous guilt cannot remain altogether unpunished! My wretched son is to come to me in the evening; and I will then banish him for ever from my sight. I will disinherit him likewise. This is not a vengeance that I shall wreak—but a just chastisement which I shall inflict!"

Charles De Vere could not utter a syllable of remonstrance against a decision which the whole aspect of circumstances demanded and necessitated. It was impossible for him to plead more than he had done on the guilty Silvio's behalf: he could not blame the father for disinheriting such a son.

"And now, my lord," he said, at length breaking silence, "let me conjure you to return without delay to your abode. You are incurring frightful risks——"

"You know not, my young friend," interrupted the Count, with mingled bitterness and sadness of look and tone, "how lightly I now hold my life. Yet will I wilfully incur no additional risk. I will depart hence—I will return to my humble lodging. We must separate: but before I leave Naples I shall see you again, or I shall communicate with you; for I must find a more fitting opportunity of expressing my gratitude for all the magnanimity of your conduct."

The Count now readjusted his disguise by re-suming the green spectacles and the ecclesiastical-shaped hat, and having pressed with fervour the hand of Charles De Vere, he issued from the church. He was wending his way back to his lodgings, when an idea occurred to his mind; and he said within himself, "Yes—it will be better to know every particular, however minute!—it will be better to ascertain every detail of this sad and fearful drama!"

The Count of Camerino still continued his way towards the same quarter in which the house where he dwelt was situated: but on reaching that neighbourhood, he did not at once return to his lodging—he bent his steps to the house inhabited by Signor Visso, his guilty wife's relative. We should observe that the Count was but little known to Signor and Signora Visso; for he had never held the slightest intercourse with these persons—he was not even on speaking terms with them.

He therefore felt well convinced that his disguise was so complete as to baffle any chance of recognition on their part.

On reaching the house, his summons at the door was answered by a female domestic; and on inquiring for Signor Visso, the nobleman was at once admitted into the room where the surgeon was accustomed to receive his patients—for the domestic thought that the seeming priest came to consult her master professionally. In a few moments the surgeon made his appearance; and he bowed with the respect which the citizens of Naples are wont to observe towards members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

"How can I serve your reverence?" asked the medical practitioner, anticipating a liberal fee from the respectable appearance of the seeming priest.

"By dealing frankly with me in reference to the queries which I am about to put to you!" responded the Count, fixing his eyes with a sudden threatening fierceness upon the surgeon. "Your guilty complicity in certain matters is known; and if you value your own safety, you will now deal with sincerity."

The conscience of Signor Visso was very far from being so pure as to enable him to sustain with calmness or self-possession the shock of this sudden address: he turned pale, and faltered out, "How have I offended your reverence? what have I done?"

"A few words will explain the object of my presence here," rejoined the Count. "You are acquainted with the Viscount Silvio di Camerino—you are the relative of the Countess Ginevra."

The surgeon now gazed with an indescribable terror upon the seeming priest; but he could not give utterance to a word—his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth—he gasped—and guilt was in every sense depicted upon his features.

"Speak!" said the Count of Camerino. "It was beneath this roof that the frail, fallen woman to whom I have alluded, became the mother of a child—illegitimately—aye, almost incestuously born! Was it not so?"

"It was—it was," said the trembling surgeon. "But who has told your reverence all this?—why do you come to me? who has sent you?"

"It is not for you to question," answered the Count: "it is your part to reply to the queries put from my lips. Listen! One night—about a fortnight back—that illegitimately born child was consigned by its guilty and half-distracted mother to the care of a stranger under circumstances so exceedingly strange and suspicious that they must be investigated. To you these circumstances cannot possibly be unknown——"

"Holy father," interrupted the surgeon, who was under the influence of the direst terror, "I will tell you all—but whatever be your power or authority in the matter, I conjure you to spare me! Everything wherein I have found myself an accomplice, was dictated or ordered by the Viscount Silvio. It was he who decided upon making away with the babe!—it was he who devised the plan for taking the life of the young Englishman in the ruins of St. Nicholas——"

"Gently," said the Count, who at once perceived that his knowledge of the whole iniquitous transactions was indeed hitherto incomplete, and

that he had much to learn: but so far from displaying any ignorance upon the point in the presence of the surgeon, he said, "Hasten not on in so excited a manner; but answer me intelligibly. I must tell you frankly that if I do not as yet know everything in its minutest details, I have a clue to the completest elucidation thereof; and if in a single instance you are now guilty of suppression or omission, it will be the worse for you in the long run! But on the other hand, if you deal frankly with me, I promise that you shall be safe."

An expression of indescribable relief appeared upon the countenance of Signor Visso, as he said, "I will answer your reverence frankly."

"First of all, then," resumed the Count, "explain to me the circumstances under which the child was consigned to the care of the young Englishman, Charles De Vere."

"I have already said," replied the surgeon, "that it was the Viscount Silvio who resolved to make away with the child: but the Countess by some means or another suspected his intention—and in order to save the babe she gave it into the keeping of that young Englishman whom you have named. At the outset Viscount Silvio told the Countess he would place the child in the Foundling Hospital—contrary to his expectations she insisted on accompanying him thither—it was in the evening——"

"Yes," interposed the Count; "and your wife went with them."

"True," answered the surgeon; "and then it was—somewhere in the streets—that the Countess Giovra suspected evil intentions on Silvio's part—and she fled with the babe."

"In the second place," said the disguised nobleman, "you have to speak to me in reference to the attempt that was made upon the life of the young Englishman."

"Yes, holy father; and on this point I will also be candid," responded the surgeon. "The Viscount Silvio dreaded lest this young Englishman should make certain revelations——"

"To whom?" demanded the seeming priest.

"The Viscount did not enter deeply into particulars with me," replied Visso: "he merely said that everything stood a chance of being discovered—that we all stood upon the brink of a precipice—and that nothing but the death of Signor De Vere could save us. So I assented to the proposal that was made to me——"

"And this was to assassinate the young Englishman!" said the Count. "When was the project attempted?"

"Yesterday evening," rejoined the surgeon,—
"at sunset."

"Ah! yesterday evening?" said the Count: and now Silvio's motives became all in an instant clear to his comprehension. "But how did the scheme fail?"

"In good sooth holy father," responded Visso, "Signor De Vere was in the first instance too much for the Viscount and myself: but at length we had him down—and to confess the truth, it would it have fared with him in another moment if the Countess herself had not appeared upon the scene."

"Ah! the Countess appeared?" said the nobleman. "But you have not told me how she dis-

covered your abominable project—or whether she herself was an accomplice in it?"

"No, no, holy father! she was not an accomplice!" exclaimed Visso. "She had been unconsciously made the means of enticing Charles De Vere to those ruins under the pretext of having important matters to communicate: but how she afterwards discovered that evil was intended, I know not. Immediately upon her appearance, I fled from the spot. I have not since seen the Viscount—I have been in fear and trembling—but you have assured me, holy father, that my safety depends upon my candour; and you have told me likewise that you have the means of judging whether I speak to you with frankness."

"Yes—I have those means," replied the Count; "and I see that you have thus far dealt with sincerity. Have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing, holy father—nothing," rejoined the surgeon. "Would that I had never meddled in these matters! would that I could now fairly see the issue of them!"

"Listen to me, Signor Visso," said the Count. "You are acquainted with a fearful secret: for your own sake retain it inviolable! Let not the knowledge thereof ever escape your lips! I have it in my power to guarantee your safety, and that of your wife, upon these conditions: but if you violate them, rest assured that a terrible punishment shall overtake you both. In the first place you plotted for the destruction of an innocent child; and in the second place you grasped the assassin-weapon to take the life of the young English gentleman. Do you know what penalties would overtake you for this double crime? The scaffold—or at least the galleys! Then beware how you violate the conditions which I have imposed! If a single whisper derogatory to the honour of the noble family of Camerino be breathed in Naples, it will at once be attributed to this house as its source; and then nothing should save you from the vengeance of those who are able to inflict it. You understand me. Farewell."

Having thus spoken, the Count of Camerino quitted the surgeon's dwelling, and began to retrace his way to his own obscure abode. He was now thoroughly acquainted with all the magnanimity of Charles De Vere's conduct: he perceived what our hero had suppressed in reference to his own knowledge of the deplorable series of transactions in which he had become mixed up; and he understood the generous purposes for which this suppression had taken place. And now too he comprehended why it was that on the preceding evening Charles had so emphatically refused to remain aloof with Silvio if the latter retained a weapon in his possession.

"Noble-minded youth!" said the Count of Camerino, thus apostrophizing the image of Charles De Vere: "you shall assuredly have your reward!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE SEA-SHORE.

WE must now return to Father Falconara, whom we left at the moment when he was issuing from

the vestary to set out on the mission confided to him by the Count of Camerino. The mind of the young priest was in a state of the most painful excitement,—not merely because he had to reproach himself for a sacrilegious deed in suffering the Count to take his place in the confessional, but likewise because he sympathized deeply with the woes and sorrows of his benefactor. He was as yet unacquainted with the full extent of Ginevra's guilt: he had learnt that she had proved faithless to her marriage vows—but it was evident that there was still a darker secret which had yet to be developed to his knowledge.

The Camerino mansion was at no great distance from the church; and it was soon reached by Father Falconara, who proceeded at a rapid pace. On arriving at the mansion, he inquired for the Countess, and was informed by the domestic to whom he addressed himself, that her ladyship had retired to her own chamber with the strict command that she was not to be disturbed.

"But perhaps the Countess will see your reverence," added the domestic, knowing that in such cases, where ladies denied themselves to all visitors, exceptions were usually made on behalf of the father confessor.

By this time the priest had composed his looks and had gathered all his self-possession to his aid: he accordingly said with his wonted serenity, "Yes—I have no doubt that her ladyship will see me. Let a message be sent to the effect that I call in reference to the business on which she just now consulted me."

A few minutes afterwards Father Falconara was conducted to the apartment where the wretched Ginevra had secluded herself. A terrible alteration had taken place in her during the last half-hour: her face was as haggard, her eyes as hollow, her looks as woe-begone as if she had just risen from her couch after a long illness. There was an expression of settled despair upon her features, blended with an aspect that denoted some sternly fixed resolve. Her desk was open upon the table: she had been writing—and she held a sealed packet in her hand as Father Falconara was introduced.

"Has your reverence anything to communicate?" she asked in a cold, level, monotonous tone, as if the announcement of any fresh calamity could scarcely add to the desperation of her feelings.

"I come from your ladyship's husband," answered the young priest: "he has charged me with certain messages to deliver——"

"Proceed: I listen," said the Countess. "Perhaps he has discovered the fulness of my guilt! Perhaps he has cursed his own son likewise?—for he extorted that name from my lips! You, Father Falconara, can best settle it with your own conscience how you permitted him to usurp your place in the confessional——But Ah! what ails you?"

The young priest had staggered, and he now sank heavily upon a seat. The tremendous secret which on his arrival there he had yet to learn, was now learnt: the fulness of Ginevra's guilt was made known to him. Pure-minded and well-principled—leading an immaculate life—the young ecclesiastic had scarcely dreamt that such a horror was possible; and it smote him therefore with the most tremendous effect. Ginevra now perceived that

the secret in all its hideous reality had only just been made known to him.

"Lady," he said, in a voice that was full of emotion, "I have indeed committed a great sin in suffering another to usurp my place at the confessional, and in giving utterance to a falsehood as a pretext for that substitution. Alas! bitter shall be my repentance! I am under no penance which incapacitates me from listening to the words that flow from the lips of a penitent, or which prevent me from giving absolution. Kneel, sinful daughter—and let us pray together."

"It is useless," answered Ginevra coldly: "the time for confession and prayer is past. Heaven refuses me its forgiveness! Step by step it wars against me, dealing blow upon blow as a punishment for my tremendous iniquity!"

"This is the language of despair," said the young priest, "and it must not issue from your lips. Heaven's mercy is illimitable——"

"But I am beyond the reach of its influence," rejoined Ginevra, utterly unmoved by the young ecclesiastic's words,—and deservedly so! "Yes—I am deservedly beyond the pale of heaven's mercies! for my crime has been very, very great. Leave me to myself—leave me to that destiny against which it were vain and useless for me to wrestle. But Ah! I remember you said that you came hither as the bearer of messages from my husband. What are his mandates? or what is the substance of the curse which he has levelled against me?"—and there was a terrible coldness in Ginevra's tone and look.

"Your husband has levelled no curse against you," answered the young priest; "and if he had, rest assured that I should not become the bearer of it. No, lady! not for worlds! my mission is that of peace and religious consolation——"

"And in the fulfilment of it," interjected Ginevra, with a cold bitterness, "you place a husband in the confessional that from the lips of his guilty wife he may extort the hideous avowal which at least might have been spared to him!"

"Ah! your reproach is indeed but too just!" said Father Falconara; "and I deserve it——Oh, I deserve it!" he added, wiping the tears from his eyes. "But if you know how I was over-persuaded—the strong appeal that was made to me——"

"Holy father, I forgive you!" said Ginevra. "I see that in the course which you adopted you were but an instrument in the hands of heaven, which, as I before said, is dealing me blow upon blow. Take this packet—it is addressed to yourself—it contains the instructions which I just now promised to leave for you. You see, therefore, that I had not completely lost all confidence in your honour, even though I knew that you likewise had turned against me! But what said my husband?"

"The Count of Camerino says, lady," replied the priest, "that the honour of the family must be outwardly maintained—that the gaze of the world must not be permitted to penetrate these walls and behold the skeleton within this house!"

"Ah! my husband speaks in these terms?" said Ginevra: "and he will not therefore wreak a deadly vengeance upon his guilty son? This assurance is at least consoling—for heaven knows there has already been a sufficiency of crime! And what more says my husband?"

"He enjoins you to retire from the world——"

"Such indeed was my intention!" responded Ginevra, in a voice that was colder and more monotonous than even at first.

"Then my mission is accomplished," said the priest, "so far as the injunctions of the Count of Camerino are concerned. But I conjure you, sinful daughter, to fall upon your knees—to join with me in prayer——"

"No!" interrupted Ginevra; "I cannot do it—I will not do it! at least not now," she immediately added. "Come to me to-morrow——"

She stopped short—and there was so singular, so sinister an expression upon her countenance that the young ecclesiastic was affrighted, though he knew not precisely what it was that he apprehended.

"Come to me to-morrow, I say," repeated Ginevra; "and then—and then——"

"Be it as you will, lady," said the priest; "it is not for me to force you into prayer when your mind is unfitted for devotion! Commune with yourself—ask pardon of heaven for the magnitude of your guilt—and prepare your soul to join with me in intercession on your behalf, when I return according to your bidding."

Father Falconara secured the sealed packet about his person, and took his departure with the deepest affliction in his heart.

"Now," said Ginevra to herself, as the door closed behind him, "I have finished with all earthly concerns!"

She repaired to her own chamber, where she enveloped herself in her mantilla; and descending a staircase, she issued by a private door from the mansion.

We must now return to Charles De Vere. On separating from the Count of Camerino, the young gentleman wandered through the streets of Naples reflecting with deep sadness upon all that had just occurred. He felt as dispirited as if the calamities which had stricken others had sent their effects rebounding upon his own head. There was a restlessness in his mind—an uneasiness savouring of a presentiment that he had not yet seen the issue of the terrible drama. For about two hours did he wander through the city, until at length feeling as if distracted by the din and bustle which prevailed in the streets, he struck into the suburbs and gained the outskirt near the sea-shore. As he approached the strand, he beheld several boats hastily putting off: the fishermen who manned them were shouting out to each other in an excited tone: it was evident that something had occurred—perhaps an accident—which had produced all this sensation. Charles approached nearer to the scene; and he inquired of an old fisherman who had remained upon the shore, what had happened.

"Some female has plunged into the sea from the top of yonder piece of rock," was the aged fisherman's reply.

"Intentionally?" asked our hero with a shudder: "for the purpose of self-destruction?"

"No doubt of it, Signor?" was the response: "it could not have been an accident—for it was done deliberately—I saw it with my own eyes. The wretched creature came advancing over yonder eminence—she went upon the jutting—there she stood for a moment—and one

of my sons——They are all in that boat, Signor——"

"Yes, yes," said Charles: "your son, what of him?"

"He declares that he saw the female clasp her hands for an instant: he thinks too that she pressed a crucifix to her lips——"

"Ales, poor creature!" said Charles: "she doubtless prayed for forgiveness when standing on the very threshold of a crime! But perhaps it may not be too late to save the unfortunate——"

"Oh, it is too late to save her, Signor," replied the fisherman; "for she never once appeared after she plunged into the water. Perhaps she struck against a fragment of rock at the bottom—or death may have been instantaneous by apoplexy. At all events she is a corpse; and all that now can be done is to fish up the body and identify it."

"What appearance had she?" inquired Charles: "to what class did she seem to belong?"

"Old age has dimmed my vision," answered the fisherman; "and besides, the rock, you see, from which she threw herself, is at a tolerable distance. But my sons declared that they thought she was a lady, as well as they could judge——"

At this moment a cry was raised from the boat that was nearest to the rock; and the old fisherman exclaimed, "My sons have discovered the body!"

And sure enough, as Charles glanced in the direction of the boat whence the cry proceeded, he saw that the old man's sons were lifting the corpse into their little bark. They then began to pull towards the shore, from which they were about two hundred yards distant. Our hero was on the point of retreating from the spot and quitting the scene of the tragedy, for he experienced not that morbid curiosity which affords the generality of persons a fearful gratification in gazing upon the dead: but scarcely had he retraced a dozen steps, when some unaccountable feeling induced him to return and remain. He could not understand why he obeyed the impulse—and yet he did obey it!

The boat shot rapidly in towards the shore: but as the prow touched the strand, the forms of the rowers concealed the corpse from the view of the old fisherman and our hero. In another moment however it was lifted by those who had dragged it up from the depths of the sea; and an ejaculation of horror burst from the lips of Charles De Vere, as his eyes caught a first glimpse of the countenance of the dead. For the suicide was Ginevra!

"You know her?" said the old fisherman hastily.

"Yes—I know her—the unfortunate lady!" exclaimed Charles. "It is the Countess of Camerino!"

The old fisherman cared nothing for any reasons that the young Englishman might have in being thus afflicted: all he now thought of was that his sons would be sure to receive a liberal reward for the discovery of the corpse of a titled lady.

"Do you hear that, Marco? do you hear that, Lupo?" he exclaimed: "and you, little Paulo!" now addressing the youngest of his four sons; "do you hear? she is a Countess! and nothing less than gold will be your recompense!"



Effusions of joy burst from the lips of the old man's sons; and they handled the corpse all the more gently after receiving the announcement. The lifeless form of Geneva was soon deposited upon the strand; and as Charles De Vere bent his shuddering gaze upon it, he beheld no signs of a concussion against a hidden rock. Beautiful she seemed even in death—far more beautiful than during the last few hours of her life; for then her countenance wore a haggard and despairing expression—but now it was placid and serene in the eternal slumber in which her sufferings were forgotten! The eyes were closed—still and motionless she lay—and upon her bosom, attached to a rosary, was the crucifix which the old fisherman's sons had seen her press to her lips the very instant she plunged into the sea.

"Convey this corpse," said Charles, in a low tremulous voice, "to the Camerino Mansion, No. 36.—AGNES.

Cover it—and bear it decently. There is your reward."

Thus speaking, he placed a couple of pieces of gold in the hand of the old fisherman; and leaving the party to the performance of their task, he walked slowly and mournfully away from the spot. He had thus seen the end of one of the principal characters who had figured in the sad and solemn melodrama wherein he himself had likewise borne a part; the tragedy had its moral—for a stupendous crime had been followed by a dread self-inflicted punishment!

For some minutes Charles meditated with the most painful feelings upon the incident that had just occurred; and then he bethought himself of the necessity of communicating it to the Count of Camerino. Therefore, on re-entering the city, he quickened his pace, and in a short time reached the Via Graciosa. He ascended to the apartment of Nino Corso; for he did not like to present him-

self in the first instance at the Count's chamber. On entering the humble room, he beheld Benedetta weeping: her husband was not there—but her children were standing by, surveying their mother in mournful silence. Charles was smitten with the idea of some new calamity having occurred; for he felt convinced that the intelligence of Ginevra's death could not as yet have possibly reached the habitation where he now found himself—and indeed he likewise remembered that Benedetta was ignorant who the mother of the child really was, while he also knew that the Count of Camerino was little likely to have enlightened her upon the point.

Charles was not however kept long in suspense: for Benedetta, rising from her seat, beckoned him to approach the little cradle; and lifting a snow-white cloth which lay over it, she showed him the child. The infant was dead!

"Ah! mother and babe both alike gone!" murmured the youth, stricken by the coincidence.

"What mean you, signor?" anxiously asked Benedetta, who had caught the sense of his words.

"I mean," replied Charles solemnly, "that death is not this day contented with having one victim: but two have been demanded! The wretched mother of that child has ceased to exist!"

He did not however choose to say any more, for fear of affording a clue to establish the identity of the infant's parent with the Countess of Camerino. Benedetta continued to weep; and after a pause our hero, glancing towards the cradle, inquired, "When did this happen?"

"Two hours ago, signor," replied Benedetta: "the poor infant was seized with convulsions—and by the time a surgeon arrived it was a corpse in my arms."

There was another pause; and then Charles asked whether he could see the gentleman who tenanted the opposite apartment? Benedetta replied in the affirmative, and showed him how he was to knock at the door, so as to convey by a signal that it was a friend who sought admittance. Our hero placed in Benedetta's hand some gold as the means for interring the dead infant; and he then took his leave of her. On knocking at the opposite door, the summons was answered by the Count of Camerino, who grasped the youth most cordially by the hand.

"You have been in the other room perhaps?" said the nobleman, in a low deep voice.

"Yes—I have been there," replied Charles significantly.

"Heaven has thought fit," resumed the Count, "to take from this earthly sphere the offspring of crime—and it were a miserable affectation to deplore the event!"

"No, my lord—it cannot be deplored," rejoined our hero. "Death has been busy to-day—I have intelligence to impart."

"Ah! what mean you?" inquired the Count quickly. "I see there is something in your looks beyond the effect which the death of that child would produce. Speak, my young friend! Perhaps the guilty Ginevra—"

"My lord," said Charles solemnly, "your erring wife has ceased to exist!"

"But how died she?" demanded the Count,

trembling all over: "is it possible that the wretched woman, driven to despair—"

"Yes, my lord—she has perished as a suicide! Not half-an-hour has elapsed since I beheld her lifeless form dragged forth from the deep waters of the sea!"

The Count of Camerino sat down: he was still trembling from head to foot with the violence of his emotions; and he said, "Unfortunate Ginevra! I did not desire this! I would not have driven thee to such a catastrophe! No!—rather, ten thousand times rather would I that thou shouldst have lived to atone for thine errors and win the pardon of heaven!"

All the natural generosity of the Count of Camerino's soul was awakened by the intelligence he had just received; and he wiped the tears from his eyes.

"I forgive thee, Ginevra! from the very bottom of my heart do I forgive thee!" he continued, in a mournful tone; "and henceforth I swear that by me thy memory shall not be contemplated with bitterness! Oh! thy fate is a sad and a terrible one—and it seems as if heaven were determined that thou and the offspring of thy shame should pass away from the earth on the same day and almost in the same hour!"

There was again a pause; and then the Count of Camerino, rising from his seat, said, "My young friend, I have learnt many things since we parted this morning in the church. Already had I every reason to admire the generosity of your conduct throughout these deplorable transactions: but now there are a thousand reasons wherefore I should admire its magnanimity. Yes—I have learnt all those particulars which you, in the loftiness of your mind, suppressed. It has come to my knowledge that my wretched son, as if not satisfied with the odious crime he had already committed, would have superadded iniquity upon iniquity: he would have taken the life of the child—his own child!—he would have taken your life also! All these things have I heard; and I comprehend full well wherefore you suppressed them in your explanations of this morning."

"And how did you ascertain, my lord," inquired Charles, "the particulars to which you have alluded?"

"I have seen the unprincipled villain Visso—and from his lips I extorted everything. Language has not the power to convey an adequate idea of the admiration which I entertain for your conduct! Rest assured that it will experience its reward!"

"Beyond your lordship's approval and that of my own conscience," replied Charles De Vere, "I seek no other recompense. Tell me, Count—is there anything that I can now do under existing circumstances?—for the corpse of your perished wife has by this time been conveyed to the mansion—the rumour of the suicide must soon spread—"

"True!" ejaculated Camerino: "that rumour will spread, and the wildest conjectures will get afloat! Yes—you can serve me in the present case. Hasten to Father Falconara, and learn what took place between himself and the hapless Ginevra—if indeed he saw her at all after she quitted the church. Then go to the Marquis of Ortona; he is my bosom friend—he will accompany you to

the mansion. Together you will search amongst Ginevra's papers; and if you discover any proofs of her frailty—any letters which might betray her crime—destroy them—destroy them! The Marquis will cause the rumour to be whispered that driven to despair by her husband's prolonged exile, the unfortunate Countess has committed suicide."

"But the Marquis, I presume," said Charles, "is unacquainted with the terrible mystery?"

"Yes," responded the Count; "but to his ears—and to his ears only—must the fearful secret be communicated! I have my reasons. In dis-inheriting my son—But no matter! Hasten, my young friend, and manage all these things for me. Perhaps you will return to me in the evening, after the painful ordeal through which I have yet to pass—I mean my parting interview with my guilty son!"

Charles had reached the door of the room, when he turned back and said, "My lord, on behalf of that son of yours, is forgiveness impossible? cannot leniency be shown?"

The nobleman's countenance became gloomily stern, as he said with sombre resoluteness, "No, impossible!"—and then he grasped De Vere's hand in admiration of this last generous interposition on Silvio's behalf.

Hours passed away; and it was about nine o'clock in the evening when Charles De Vere returned to the Via Graciosa. He found the Count of Camerino anxiously awaiting his presence.

"All has been done, my lord, as you desired," said the youth. "In the first place I saw Father Falconare, who was cruelly shocked on receiving the intelligence of the wretched end of the Countess—"

"Had he seen her?" inquired the Count, with hasty utterance.

"Yes, my lord; and she gave him a packet containing a document appointing him the trustee of whatsoever property it was in her power to dispose of. The whole was to be realized to form a fund for the maintenance of the child; and thus it is evident that when she left these parting instructions, she contemplated suicide—or else she would have bequeathed a portion of her property to the convent she might enter. Moreover, Father Falconare, recalling to mind the unfortunate lady's looks and certain expressions which she made use of during their last interview, feels convinced that self-destruction was resolutely settled in her thoughts."

"And what in reference to the Marquis of Ortona?" inquired the Count.

"I saw that nobleman—and I told him everything," continued Charles. "Need I say that he was most painfully shocked?—for towards yourself he experiences a more than friendship—it is the love of a brother!"

"Yes—we are very old friends," said the Count, with much emotion. "Did you visit the mansion?"

"I did," was the reply; "and the Marquis accompanied me. The domestics were in consternation: but the Marquis said all that he could to soothe and console them—and he expressed his opinion that the unfortunate Countess, frenzied by this protracted separation from yourself, had in a

moment of despair perpetrated self-destruction. We searched among the papers of the deceased—but we found not a line nor a word calculated to betray the fatal secret. The Marquis wished to accompany me hither this evening; but I represented to his lordship that it would be better for him to await a message from you."

The Count expressed his gratitude to De Vere for the manner in which he had fulfilled his instructions; and our hero hesitatingly and anxiously inquired, "Have you seen your son?"

"No," replied the Count: "he has not been—and now I expect him not. Doubtless he has heard the intelligence of Ginevra's death? And who can tell but that she herself might have sent him a warning word to the effect that everything was discovered? But even if she had not done so, the fearful rumour of her suicide would strike his guilty conscience with something more than a suspicion! No—Silvio will not come; and perhaps it is better thus! I have no longer a wife—no longer a son: utterly bereaved am I! Oh, my young friend! it requires a preterhuman courage to bear up against such a fate as this!"

There was a solemn pause; and then the Count said, as if a sudden idea struck him, "I shall visit the mansion stealthily—I shall bend one last look upon her whom I loved so tenderly ere her guilt became known—I shall kneel by the side of the couch where she lies—and I shall implore heaven to have mercy upon her soul! Will you accompany me?"

"I will, my lord," answered our hero; for the request was too sacred to be refused. "But consider the risk you incur——"

"I am indifferent on that point," responded the Count: "but even if it were otherwise, there is indeed little danger of my detection—for at eleven o'clock this night I shall leave Naples."

"At least, my lord," urged our hero, "resume that clerical garb which you wore in the morning——"

"It is already packed up in my trunk—and the trunk itself is in Nino Corso's vehicle. To baffle the police, should they happen to be upon the scent, certain changes of garb are requisite. Dressed as I now am, as a simple citizen, I leave the city of Naples: but when once on the outskirts, I change my raiment—I become a priest. You do not understand these things: heaven grant that you never may! And now let us depart. All my arrangements for the journey are made; I will simply say farewell to Benedetta and leave word where her husband is to take me up at eleven o'clock."

The nobleman muffled himself up in his cloak, and passed into the opposite room, where he remained for a few minutes. He then rejoined Charles De Vere; and he said, "I had forgotten something. Take charge of this packet: it is addressed to the Marquis of Ortona—deliver it to him in the course of to-morrow—and express my regrets that I should have been unable to see him previous to my departure. Whatever else I may have to communicate, is contained in this packet."

"I will faithfully fulfil your lordship's instructions," answered Charles, as he received the packet and secured it about his person.

Our hero and the nobleman then departed from

the house, and began threading their way through the various streets leading towards the Camerino Mansion. A complete silence was maintained between them: but the keen eye of the Count ever and anon flung a look behind, or to the right or to the left, to assure himself that he was not being watched or dogged by any hirelings of the police. On this point he seemed to be pretty well satisfied; and the neighbourhood of his own mansion was reached in safety. His own mansion! Yes—that dwelling from which he had been nearly a twelve-month absent, and which crime had now made desolate! The owner of that lordly palace was approaching it as if with the stealthiness of a thief; and Charles wondered how he would effect an entry without being observed by his domestics. A question to this effect our young hero now put to the nobleman.

"I have already thought well upon the subject," answered the Count of Camerino. "In this unfortunate country it would be the height of indiscretion to trust to one's domestics; for such is the diabolic subtlety of the police, that spies are introduced into every house on which suspicion has fallen—and in the person of the most obsequious lacquey, the readiest page, or the most stolid-looking stable-boy, one of their agents may be concealed!"

"Then what will your lordship do?" inquired Charles De Vere.

"You must lend me your assistance," replied the Count. "The old housekeeper has been for years in my family; and she can be relied upon. It is for you to ring at the front gate and ask to see the women. In her ear you may whisper the fact that I am in Naples, and that it is my mournful wish to kneel for a few instants by the side of my unfortunate wife's remains. She will enable me to obtain admittance by the private door opening into the garden. Meanwhile I will hasten round to the alley at the back of the grounds—I will scale the wall—and by the time the private door is opened I shall have reached it."

Charles and the Count accordingly separated on the spot where this little colloquy took place; and the youth proceeded to the principal entrance of the Camerino Mansion. He inquired for the housekeeper; and a page in waiting at once conducted him to the room occupied by that elderly female. The three or four servants whom he met while proceeding thither, wore an expression of the deepest sadness upon their countenances; for death was in that house, and they had loved their deceased mistress. None suspected the secret of her guilt:—upon their minds rested the impression that she had committed suicide in a moment of despair on account of the protracted absence of her husband. This same impression likewise existed with the elderly housekeeper, who was seated in the most pensive sadness at the instant when Charles was introduced into her presence.

He guardedly communicated to this confidential female the fact that the Count was in Naples, and that he sought a stealthy admission into that palatial residence where in past times he had trod with the dignity and freedom of a master. The housekeeper was at first overwhelmed with mingled astonishment and apprehension: then she put a thousand questions; but Charles assured her there was no time for discourse—and she therefore hastened to perform the part that was required of

her. She led our young hero up the principal staircase: they reached the landing which communicated with the state-rooms; and there they threaded a series of passages, towards the top of the private staircase. Down this they went: the housekeeper opened the door at the bottom; and in a few moments the Count of Camerino emerged from amidst the shade of a group of evergreens which bordered a grass-plot in the garden. When he had entered the mansion, and that private door was closed, the housekeeper regarded him for a few instants with an air of mistrust, as if she could not altogether make up her mind that it was her master whom she beheld before her—so altered was his countenance, not merely by the beard being shaven off and the hair of his head being cropped close, but likewise by the effects of care and anguish. When, however, he took her hand and spoke kindly to her, she knew that it was indeed her master; and she burst into tears. She was giving way to her lamentations, when the Count entreated her to be calm, as the slightest circumstance might betray his presence at the mansion; and the good woman exerted all her energy to subdue her emotions. She now led the way up the private staircase; and first of all conducted the Count and Charles into an apartment, where she left them for a few minutes while she hastened to assure herself that none of the deceased's Ginevra's maids were in the chamber in which the corpse lay. All being in accordance with her wishes in this respect, she returned to the apartment where she had left her master and our hero; and she said, "Your lordship can now follow me."

Charles, from motives of delicacy, purposed to remain where he was; but the Count said in a low whisper, "Come with me, my young friend. I have a particular reason!"

De Vere accordingly followed the nobleman from the room; and they were led by the housekeeper into an elegantly furnished ante-chamber, communicating with Ginevra's own apartment.

"Tarry you here, my faithful servant," said the Count to the housekeeper, "so that you may give us warning if anything at all suspicious should occur."

The Count had really little or no fear upon this point: but he wished to be alone with his young friend, by the side of the corpse in the adjacent apartment. Into that apartment they entered; and the door was closed behind them. There, upon the couch, lay the perished Ginevra, with a sheet thrown over her. The housekeeper had already informed her master and our hero that precisely as the Countess had been brought home by the fishermen, so had she been laid upon that couch; for as it had been a case of violent death, it was necessary to await the official visit of the Commissary of Police on the morrow, before any arrangements could be made for the laying out of the corpse.

And now by the side of that couch on which lay his perished and guilty wife, stood the Count of Camerino! His arms were folded across his breast: he stretched not forth a hand to lift the sheet from the face of the dead: his features, pale and rigid, indicated the working of strong feelings within. Charles at length asked in a low tone, "Shall I rise that coverlet?"

"Yes, my young friend," replied the Count, in a voice that was scarcely audible.

Slowly did De Vera lift the sheet: calm and beautiful lay Ginevra, as if she were sleeping; and from her countenance had passed away the traces of all the anguish which she endured at the moment when she took the fatal plunge into the waters of the Bay of Naples. The nobleman started as if surprised to see that she looked thus tranquil and lovely even in her death; and then he murmured in a broken voice, "Oh, Ginevra, Ginevra! to think that you should have been so deeply criminal!"

There was a pause for nearly a minute, during which the workings of the Count's features denoted a strong inward agitation; and at length sinking upon his knees, he said, "I forgive thee, Ginevra!—for this purpose have I come! And that you, my dear friend," he continued, addressing himself to Charles, "should be the witness of this proclamation of pardon from my lips, so far as the perished one *here* is concerned, have I brought you into the chamber of death! All rancour is banished now—at least with regard to *her*!—and may her soul repose in peace! Alas, poor frail, erring mortal!"

Here the Count's voice was choked by his emotions as he took the cold hand of the dead and for an instant pressed it to his lips. Our hero was deeply affected, and tears started from his eyes. The Count prayed in silence for some minutes: then he rose from his knees—and bending over the face of the dead, he imprinted a kiss upon the marble brow. He made a sign for Charles to replace the sheet over that lifeless countenance; and he turned towards the door. He passed into the ante-chamber, followed by Charles; and they found the housekeeper upon her knees, before a little crucifix upon a toilet-table. She was praying devoutly. She rose from her suppliant posture; and the Count said, "I am about to leave my mansion as stealthily as I entered it. Heaven only knows whether I shall ever return hither! But the Marquis of Ortona will receive certain instructions: as a friend he will fulfil them: and you, my good woman, will find that I am not indifferent to the welfare of a faithful servant."

Having thus spoken, the Count of Camerino pressed the hand of the worthy housekeeper; and he then hastened from the room. But scarcely had he set foot in the passage, when there was a rush of heavy steps—four or five police-agents sprang forward—and upon the ears of Charles sounded the ominous words, "You are our prisoner, my lord! We arrest you in the King's name!"

stole upon his eyes; and he slumbered till the morning. When he awoke he could scarcely persuade himself that all the incidents of the past evening were otherwise than a dream; and he was even compelled to review them deliberately to become convinced of their reality.

An exquisite breakfast was served up to him: an hour or two passed—and it was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon when the door opened and the Chief of Police made his appearance. Silvio now thought that if there were any treacherous proceeding or insidious capial on Ciprina's part, the moment had come when he should ascertain the fact; and it was therefore with some degree of anxiety and suspense that he flung a searching look upon the countenance of the Prefect. That countenance was however calm; and there was a certain degree of urbanity in the high official's manner as he expressed the hope that the Viscount had slept well and had experienced all possible attentions? Silvio, infinitely relieved, at once replied, "I have naught to complain of, my lord, on that score."

"I regret," proceeded the Chief of Police, "that your detention is likely to last a few hours longer than I could have at first foreseen. His Majesty the King left Naples at an early hour this morning on a visit to a nobleman's country seat at some little distance: and he will not return until five or six o'clock in the evening."

"It is of no consequence," replied Silvio, as if with a careless manner. "A few hours more or less will make no difference under existing circumstances."

"This is precisely what I thought and hoped," said the Chief of Police: "for I remember well that you last night informed me you were not to see your father again until the evening."

"Yes, my lord—such was the appointment that he gave me," rejoined the Viscount.

"And therefore," continued the Minister, "everything holds good—does it not?—according to our compact?"

"Everything, my lord," answered Silvio.

"I have not been idle," continued the Chief of Police: "I have already communicated secretly and confidentially with the Minister of the Interior; and the decree for your pardon is drawn up. It needs but the signature of his Majesty; and this shall be obtained in the evening. Then, my lord, you will give the information which is required of you; and the moment that this is done, the decree shall be placed in your hands. But you must not expect the doors of your prison-chamber to be thrown open until the Count of Camerino shall be in the custody of my *shirri*."

"Be it as you say, my lord," replied Silvio, adding with a certain bitterness of tone, "I see that the compact is so infamous you will not give credit to my sincerity until you have the most positive proof that I am earnest in the fulfilment of my bargain!"

The Minister made no reply: but bowing coldly he issued from the apartment.

It full well suited Silvio's new plans and hopes that this delay should have arisen; and he considered it to be almost providentially favourable to his cause.

"Heaven itself is interposing," he said, "to prevent the consummation of the foul crime which

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE PREFECTURE.

WE must now return to the Viscount Silvio Di Camerino, whom we left at the Prefecture of Police, after his strange interview with the beautiful Ciprina. Having meditated for a long time upon all that had occurred between himself and that lady, Silvio sought the couch which was prepared for him in his prison-apartments. Sleep

would even amount to parricide, as the condition of my release! Ciprina is truthful and sincere; and she will effect my deliverance. But Ah! everything now depends upon the alternatives whether she be first in executing her own design before the Chief of Police returns to me with the decree of pardon in his hand!"

The hours went by, during which the Viscount remained in an almost torturing state of suspense; for he feared lest the Minister of Police should be beforehand in the matter—and if this proved to be the case, he knew not what pretext to raise or what excuse to make to obtain an additional delay. In the afternoon the door again opened; and the Prefect once more presented himself. Silvio's heart sank within him. What if the King had returned at an earlier hour than was expected?

"My lord," said the Prefect, "I consider it my duty to communicate a piece of intelligence which has just reached me; and you are the best judge whether it will be likely to lead to any change in your plans already settled."

"What mean you, my lord?" demanded Silvio anxiously.

"The young Countess of Camerino," continued the Minister, "has committed suicide!"

"Suicide?"—and Silvio staggered beneath the blow which thus suddenly smote him.

"It is even so, my lord. The unfortunate lady has drowned herself; and her corpse has been conveyed to the Camerino Mansion."

Silvio clasped his hands in despair; for he felt that he was the author, in a manner more or less direct, of this horrible tragedy—and that he was the murderer of his own father's wife!

"It is said, my lord," proceeded the Minister, "that the young Countess of Camerino committed self-destruction in a moment of madness caused by a prolonged separation from her husband. You, my lord, perhaps best know whether this be the truth?"—and the Prefect's keen searching eyes were fixed with a sinister significance upon the guilty Viscount.

"I do not understand you, my lord," answered Silvio, with a desperate effort recovering his self-possession.

"It is useless for me to beat about the bush, or prove fastidious under existing circumstances," continued the Prefect. "The suicide of the Countess Ginevra has cleared up to my knowledge something that was previously mysterious. Did you not last night tell me that you had done something which your father stood upon the brink of discovering, even if by that time he had not already discovered it? Did you not moreover assure me that this fact alone would induce him to disinherit you? and were you not most anxious upon all these points? That something which you had committed and which the Count of Camerino stood on the verge of discovering,—was it not a guilty intrigue with the Countess Ginevra? Answer me, my lord! There need be no secrets betwixt you and me!"

"And what if it even were so?" asked the guilty Viscount.

"Simply that I would now ascertain," rejoined the Chief of the Police, "whether, under these altered circumstances, you still possess the power of delivering your father into my hands?—whether the appointment which he gave you for to-night

will be kept?—or whether, dreading the extreme of treachery on the part of his son, he may not change his abode, or else flee at once from Naples? On all these points, my lord, you, I repeat, are the best judge."

Silvio reflected deeply for a few minutes; and then he replied in a gloomy, sombre voice, "I feel convinced that I shall still be enabled to fulfil my compact, odious and horrible though that consummation of all my guilt will be! But let it be postponed, my lord, until a late hour to-night. I have my own reasons—I know what I have to do—In a word, I can confidently pledge myself on the fulfilment of my compact!"

"Tis well, my lord," said the Chief of the Police: and he took his departure.

When Silvio was alone, he sat down, buried his face in his hands, and gave way to his painful meditations. He was a prey to a horrible state of uncertainty. Had his father discovered the tremendous secret of his guilt?—and had the wretched Ginevra, in consequence of this discovery, put an end to her days? Silvio dreaded that such must indeed be the case; for he remembered only too well the parting scene with his sire on the preceding evening in the Via Graciosa. And yet, on the other hand, was it not possible that the discovery should still be unmade?—and that Ginevra, already overwhelmed by an intolerable weight of affliction, had in the distraction of her mind put a period to her existence?

"Oh, this horrible state of uncertainty!" exclaimed Silvio, suddenly starting up to his feet. "I also shall become distracted! But no!—this is childish on my part! I must be a man! What shall I do? Is not my position as well-nigh desperate as it can be?—and must I not throw myself upon the first chance that comes? Yes!—if Ciprina be the first to communicate with me, so much the better! But if, on the other hand, the Chief of the Police be the first to come—like Satan in human form, bearing in his hand the price of my iniquity—I must yield to the pressure of circumstances!"

As the hours now passed, Silvio was incessantly flinging his eyes into the recess which contained the secret door, with the hope that Ciprina would make her appearance. Dinner was served up to him: he could scarcely eat a morsel—but he drank copiously of the wine that accompanied the repast. Then he again kept watching the empty recess; and at length, to his unspeakable relief, he beheld the door suddenly open.

The beautiful Fidelia appeared upon the threshold. She placed her finger upon her lip, and made a sign for the Viscount to follow her. Snatching up his hat and cloak, he at once obeyed; and she conducted him into the apartment where on the preceding evening he had held that long conversation with Ciprina. This beautiful lady was there to receive him; and they met as if they were old friends—for circumstances had established a certain degree of intimacy between them. He took her hand and pressed it to his lips, as he anxiously asked, "Are the arrangements made? Can we escape?"

"Yes," she replied; "everything is settled! Thanks to this faithful girl, whose name of Fidelia is indeed most appropriate—"

"You have promised to take me with you, dear

lady," said Fidelia, "and to let me live with you henceforth, for I detest and loathe this place!"

"Rest assured," interjected Silvio, "that your welfare, Fidelia, shall ever henceforth be our care! You have every claim upon our gratitude! But what is now to be done?—for I tremble, beautiful Ciprina, lest the Prefect should return at any moment to my apartment!"

"There need not be an instant's delay," responded Ciprina. "But there is a deed more or less desperate for you to perform, my lord——"

"Name it! name it!" exclaimed Silvio. "Mine is a position that will not suffer me to be daunted by a trifle!"

"That sentinel in the yard below," rejoined Ciprina, with an anxious look—"he constitutes the only barrier between ourselves and freedom! Fidelia has possessed herself of all the necessary keys—a carriage is waiting at a little distance—we have passports made out in fictitious names—in short, my lord——"

"How am I to deal with that sentinel?" inquired Silvio. "Shall I kill him?—or shall I risk everything on the issue of a struggle?"

"There must be no bloodshed if it can be avoided!" interposed Fidelia, with a visible shudder. "If you feel yourself strong and confident, my lord, you may overpower him with a blow—you may stun him——"

"But if a single cry escapes his lips," added Ciprina, "we are lost! Dearest Fidelia, you must consent, as I have already told you, to leave this matter entirely to the Viscount!"

"Be it so," said the girl: but her beautiful face was very pale.

"Take this, my lord," said Ciprina, presenting a dagger to Silvio. "The handle is heavy—if you grasp the blade, you may perhaps deal a blow that shall deprive the man of consciousness—and if we only gain five minutes, it will prove sufficient for our purpose! Come, Fidelia: let us depart. Every instant's delay is fraught with danger!"

Ciprina and Fidelia now enveloped themselves in cloaks which they had in readiness: the Viscount put on his own cloak, beneath which he grasped the dagger with the determination of using it as effectually as circumstances might demand. Fidelia peeped forth from the apartment: the passage outside was clear; and they all three hastened along it, Fidelia leading the way. At the extremity there was a door, which the young Italian girl opened by means of a pass-key of which she had possessed herself; and a staircase was revealed. When the threshold was crossed the door was closed and locked again: but as the staircase was involved in total darkness, they were compelled to descend it cautiously. On reaching the bottom, Fidelia said in a whisper to Silvio, "My lord, there is a door which opens into the court-yard. I will leave it ajar for a few instants,—the tread of the sentinel's feet will enable you to judge how to act—watch your opportunity—and if bloodshed can be avoided, for heaven's sake go not to extremes. If otherwise——"

She stopped short, with a gasping sound in her throat; and in the trepidation which seized upon her, she dropped the pass-key on the stone floor of the little vestibule at the bottom of the stairs.

"For heaven's sake, be cautious, Fidelia!"

said Ciprina, startled by the sound which the key thus made.

"I am completely self-possessed," said the young girl, now speaking in a calm tone.

The next instant the key was heard slightly grating in the lock—the door moved on its hinges—and a faint glimmering of light from without was thrown through the opening into the vestibule. All was now breathless attention there. The footsteps of the sentinel were heard at the extremity of the yard—likewise the voice of the man, for he was humming a tune. Slowly he began to retrace his way; and as he approached the door, Silvio closed it almost completely, but keeping himself in readiness to tear it open when the suitable moment should arrive. The sentinel drew nearer and nearer, still humming his tune: now he passed the door—then quick as thought that door was opened—and Silvio glided over the threshold. Following Ciprina's suggestion, he grasped the blade of the dagger with his right hand: with his left he suddenly seized upon the soldier, whose shako fell off—and in the twinkling of an eye the heavy hilt of the poniard came in violent concussion with his head. Down he fell as if shot through the heart; and Silvio was fortunate enough to catch the man's musket, so that it fell not with crashing sound upon the stone pavement of the yard. It was all the work of a moment—but a moment of fearful suspense for Ciprina and Fidelia!

Silvio dragged the sentinel into the little vestibule, assuring the lady and her attendant that the man was not dead, but merely rendered senseless by the blow. Fidelia closed the door upon the unconscious soldier, and locked it. She hastily led the way across the court-yard: she opened a door on the other side; and this afforded admission into a dark corridor, which was quickly threaded. At the extremity there was another door, which the pass-key opened: and the three adventurous individuals now entered a small garden attached to the Prefecture.

"We are safe!" said Fidelia, in accents of exultation.

Most welcome was this announcement to Silvio, and scarcely less so to Ciprina, as Fidelia led the hurried way along the gravel walk which was shaded by evergreens. They reached the garden-wall; the gate was quickly opened: and they issued forth into a narrow street which was bounded by that garden-wall on one side, and by a range of high buildings on the other. Along the street they sped; and it was at the extremity of this thoroughfare that they expected to find the vehicle which Fidelia had engaged to be in attendance there. But no such equipage was on the spot. Was it a mistake? The driver of the vehicle had received half of his remuneration beforehand, so that his services might, as it was thought, be effectually secured: but still he was not there. What was to be done? There were few public vehicles in that particular quarter of Naples; and it would be dangerous for the fugitives to penetrate into the more frequented parts where a hackney-coach could be procured. They all three stood still and listened in the hope of hearing the approach of wheels. But no such welcome sound reached them. The case seemed almost desperate—or at least a desperate effort must be made to meet the

emergency. Time was slipping away; and if their flight from the Prefecture were discovered, the streets would be quickly inundated by the police spies in search of them. Ciprina was trembling with alarm lest she should again fall into the power of the Chief of Police: Fidelia was ready to sink with affright at the thought of being dragged back into the presence of her stern harsh father. Silvio saw that the lady and the young girl were alike incapable of rendering any assistance: and suddenly making up his mind, he said, "Remain you here for a few minutes—be sure not to leave the spot—I will hasten off in a direction where there is a chance of obtaining a conveyance."

Away sped Silvio; and scarcely had he reached the next street, when he heard the sounds of an equipage approaching. He stopped—it speedily came up—it was passing—it was an unoccupied hackney-chaise; and he hailed the driver.

"I can't stop, sir? I am engaged!" exclaimed the man.

"What! Nino Corso?" ejaculated the Viscount in a tone of joy.

Nino, instantaneously recognising that voice, pulled in his horse; and Silvio, hastening forward, said, "This is a most fortunate meeting, good Nino! You know who I am—you and I have met before;"—and he made the sign which shewed him to be a member of the secret political organization to which they had both belonged.

"Yes, I know you, my lord," answered Nino Corso; "and I knew also that you were in Naples; for the porter of the house where I live, told me so—as did likewise your good father," added Nino, leaning down from the box of the vehicle, and whispering these last words in the low tone of extreme caution. "Alas, my lord! have you heard the sad intelligence? The Countess of Camerino——"

"Yes, yes, Nino—I have heard of it—and I am distressed!" replied Silvio. "But I want your equipage. You must take me—and you must drive round to the corner of the next street——"

"I can take you, my lord, if you like—and with pleasure too!" replied Nino: "but I cannot go an inch out of my way, nor receive any additional company."

"But you must! you must!" ejaculated Silvio vehemently. "I have two companions waiting for me—a lady and her maid—the case is urgent——"

"My lord," interjected Nino, "I cannot help it. You really must not press me! In a word, I am engaged to take your own father out of Naples."

"My father!" ejaculated Silvio. "And where is he?"

"Ah, my lord!" responded Nino mournfully; "where should his lordship be under such distressing circumstances, but by the bedside——"

"You do not mean, Nino," said the Viscount, "that my father has gone to his own mansion?"

"Yes—I do mean it, my lord. He told Benedetta—that is the name of my wife, my lord—that he was going there with Signor De Vere. I just now ran home for something I had forgotten—and Benedetta told me that they had only set off a few minutes previous. Come, my lord—jump in—time presses——"

"No, no, Nino!" interjected the Viscount: "I cannot go with my father. Ah! those sounds! Good night, Nino! good night! Pursue your way!"

Having thus spoken, the Viscount Di Camerino darted off—for he had heard the noise of a vehicle passing along at the lower extremity of the street where this incident took place; and he felt assured that it must be the one which Fidelia had engaged.

"Good night, my lord," answered Nino Corso; and whipping his horse he pursued his way, wondering at the young nobleman's excitement.

The Viscount hurried along the street in the opposite direction: but all of a sudden he was pounced upon by half-a-dozen police agents; and close at hand he recognised the Prefect himself. One of these agents happened to be the very man who had recognised him on the preceding night; and thus he had now no difficulty in again discerning at a glance who was the wearer of that muffling cloak and that broad-brimmed elouching hat. Resistance was utterly vain, although the Viscount still had the dagger about his person: he was at once overpowered, and confronted with the Chief of the Police.

"Keep at a little distance," said the Minister to his agents; "and leave the prisoner with me.—My lord," he continued, as the officials dispersed on different sides of the street, some before and some behind, so that Silvio continued as completely a captive as when their iron grasp was upon him,—“my lord, you have performed an infamous part; and I now ask you whether you are ready to fulfil your compact—or whether you will return to the Prefecture, to be thence consigned to a dungeon, and thence to be transferred to the scaffold? Speak, my lord—yes or no?—and if your answer be in the affirmative, hold yourself prepared to act at once; for you shall not have another chance of deceiving me!”

"I will fulfil my compact," replied the Viscount, shuddering at the fearful alternative that was held out. "But do you, my lord, still adhere to your own side of the bargain?"

"I will!" answered the Chief of the Police. "Look!" he continued, as he drew the Viscount near to a lamp and drew forth a paper: "here is your pardon—it is duly signed by the King. When your father is in my power it shall be placed in your hands. Now, then, which way do we go?"

"This way," answered the Viscount, pointing in a particular direction.

"Good!" said the Chief of the Police, taking the young nobleman's arm with his left hand: then with his right he drew forth a pistol, adding coolly, "You see, my lord, that it will be useless for you to attempt an escape. Moreover my men, who are interspersed about, remain upon the alert; and at the first sign of a treacherous intent on your part, you shall be shot down like a dog."

"I will fulfil my promise," replied Silvio. "You cannot wonder, my lord, that I should endeavour to escape from the Prefecture when the chance threw itself in my way: but now that it has failed, I am glad enough to fall back upon our original bargain."

"Be it so," said the Prefect. "As for that



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worthless mistress of mine who aided in your escape, and who fled in your company, she may go her ways—and I rejoice that I am well rid of her. She may take the girl too——”

“Your Excellency therefore knows everything?” said Silvio inquiringly.

No. 37.—AGNES.

“You see that I do,” rejoined the Chief of the Police. “The sentinel, my lord, whom you struck down, is suffering severely from the blow—and perhaps he may not recover. As for your attempt at escape, I certainly ought not to wonder at it; but it is fortunate for my views,” added the

Minister drily, "that it has not succeeded. And now whither are you leading us?"

"To the Camerino Mansion," replied Silvio.

"The Camerino Mansion?" ejaculated the Prefect. "Is it possible that your father has been all the time harboured there?"

"No, my lord—he has not," interrupted Silvio; "and it has now become unnecessary to tell your Excellency where he *did* live. I am already about to perpetrate sufficient mischief, without compromising the safety of other persons. It is enough for you to know that at the Camerino Mansion my father will be found."

The Chief of the Police and Viscount Silvio now walked on together in silence, the police-agents pursuing their own way, one by one, at a little distance—yet scattering themselves in such a manner as to be ready at a moment's warning to cut off Silvio's retreat in case he should attempt to fly. They soon came in the neighbourhood of the Camerino Mansion; and Silvio said, "Be kind enough to remember that portion of our compact which stipulated that my father should not learn who was the author of his betrayal."

"It shall be remembered, my lord," said the Prefect. "Here we halt."

The Minister made a sign for his men to approach him; and he said, "Go, some of you, to the Camerino Mansion—and arrest the Count, whom you will find there. Do not suffer it to transpire in his presence that you have seen his son with me. Molest no one else within the walls of that habitation."

Four of the police-agents at once started forward to do the bidding of their Chief, who remained with the prisoner and the other two *sbirri* in the shade of an archway leading to some conventual establishment. Scarcely had the four officials set off to the door of the Camerino Mansion, which was about fifty yards distant, when a chaise came along at a rapid rate.

"See who is in that vehicle," said the Chief of the Police, significantly, to one of his men. "We shall require a carriage immediately; and perhaps that one may serve our purpose."

The official thus addressed, hastened forward and commanded the driver of the vehicle to stop. The man at once obeyed, for police-law was paramount in Naples; and the official, on opening the door, beheld two females enveloped in cloaks. That significance with which the Prefect had issued his orders, was evidently well understood by the agent: for he said, "Come, ladies, you must show your passports if not your faces."

Fidelis, who was one of those two females, could not repress a cry of terror; and the official exclaimed, "Ah! what?—are these the missing birds? You had better alight, both of you, and come and speak to our Chief."

The Minister now summoned his agent back to the gateway; and consigning Silvio to the care of the two *sbirri*, he went forward to the vehicle.

"Descend immediately!" he said. "You, Fidelis, return to your father and beseech his pardon."

The trembling girl alighted; and as at that very instant another police-agent was passing by, the Minister banded her over to his care, ordering him to conduct her back to the Prefecture. Fidelis endeavoured to gasp forth something—but

she could not; and the police-agent hurried her off.

"Ciprina," said the Minister, "you yourself, by your conduct, have put an end to everything but twist yourself and me. Go!—you are in possession of your freedom. I care not any longer to keep in a gilded cage a bird that affects to be pleased with my kindness, but who dissembles only for the purpose of finding the means of escape. Depart!—and see that you are not within the precincts of Naples when the sun rises on the morrow; or rest assured it will be the worse for you!"

Ciprina had descended from the vehicle; and the Prefect imperiously waved his hand as a signal that she should hasten off on foot. She gave not utterance to a word, but sped away, only too much rejoiced to find that she was really in possession of her freedom.

"Now," said the Chief of the Police to the driver of the vehicle, "turn and draw up at the entrance of yonder mansion: for you have a prisoner to receive there."

We should observe, in order to fill up a little gap in our narrative, that this was actually the vehicle which Fidelis had engaged, as already stated: but the driver of it happened to be a few minutes behind his time. When he arrived upon the spot where Ciprina and Fidelis were awaiting him, they bade him tarry for a few minutes, as they expected the speedy return of some one who was to accompany them. But ten minutes went by, and Silvio did not make his appearance. Ciprina was dreadfully alarmed by the delay: Fidelis was sinking with terror. The minutes to them seemed hours. At length selfishly consulting their own safety only, they took their seats in the vehicle, and ordered it to drive off. The result has already been explained; and it may appear to be a miserably mean and petty vengeance which the Prefect wreaked upon Ciprina to compel her to descend from the chaise and go wandering through the streets at that time of night in search of another conveyance—but his purpose was twofold, and it was a double revenge which he was thus taking, as the reader will presently see.

Scarcely was this incident accomplished, when one of the police-agents who had been sent into the mansion to arrest the Count of Camerino, came hurrying to the archway with the intelligence that the capture was effected. A cold shudder swept through Silvio's form as he thus heard the tidings which made him aware that his foul treachery had succeeded, and that he had given up his own father to a dungeon and to the scaffold!

"Is the prisoner in the vehicle?" inquired the Chief of the Police.

"He is doubtless there by this time, my lord," was the response.

The Minister then whispered a few hasty words to the agent, who sped back towards the mansion.

"My lord," said Silvio, in a deep sombre tone, "my iniquity is consummated—give me the price of it! The King's pardon and my immediate freedom!"

"Yes—the King's pardon," said the Minister, beginning to feel about his person as if for a document. "The King's pardon, you say——"

"Yes, my lord! quick, for heaven's sake!" exclaimed Silvio impatiently; "and let me get beyond the atmosphere of Naples. It seems to me fearfully oppressive! But, Ah! what is this?"

The ejaculation was caused by the sudden dashing-up of the vehicle to the front of the archway, where it stopped short.

"It means," exclaimed the Prefect, in a tone that was terribly malignant, "that as you would have broken your compact if you had the power, I now break it, for I possess that power! Here is the King's pardon!"—and tearing the document into fragments, he scattered the pieces at the feet of the wretched Viscount.

A wild cry of anguish burst from Silvio's lips: he felt frantic—as if he were going mad!

"Ah, villain!" continued the Chief of Police, "you would take away my mistress—would you? You leagued with her against me! I have thrown her upon the streets as an emblem of the wretched fate to which she will sooner or later come down; and you, my lord, shall be borne back to captivity in that very same vehicle which you doubtless hoped would convey you into security afar from Naples!"

"Miscreant!" exclaimed Silvio, endeavouring with a desperate effort to release himself from the *shirri* that he might spring upon the Minister and hurl him on the ground—trample on him—or tear him to pieces.

But firm was the grasp which those officials had upon him: the Minister gave vent to a mocking laugh of triumph—the door of the chaise was opened—and the Viscount was flung into the vehicle.

"Silvio!" exclaimed the Count of Camerino, with a cry which showed that he recoiled from a contact with his son as if from that of a venomous reptile. "Unnatural boy!"

"Pardon, pardon, father!" cried Silvio, in accents of indescribable anguish; "forgive me, I beseech you!"

But at that moment the voice of the Prefect was heard at the window of the vehicle, saying, "My Lord Count of Camerino, it was your own son who betrayed you into my power!"

A moan of ineffable agony came from the lips of the wretched father—a shriek of despair from those of the son; and the ejaculation, "Just heaven!" was uttered by some one who came up to the spot at the instant.

This last was Charles De Vere, who thus reached the scene in time to learn the horrifying tale of Silvio's crowning iniquity.

The equipage drove away, guarded by the *shirri*; and the Chief of the Police, heeding a stern look upon our hero, demanded, "Who are you, Signor?"

"May it please your lordship," said the only police-agent who now remained upon the spot, "this young gentleman was with the Count of Camerino, inside the mansion, at the time of his arrest. But as your Excellency's orders were positive, to molest no one except the Count himself——"

"Good! you have performed your duty," interrupted the Minister: then turning to Charles, he said, "Again I ask, who are you, Signor?"

"My name is De Vere," was the reply; "and I am an *attaché* to the English Embassy."

"Ah! that is different!" said the Prefect, in-

stantaneously becoming affable and polite. "I presume that it was some motive of private friendship——"

"I was present, my lord," answered Charles, who knew the Prefect by sight, "when the body of the unfortunate Countess was dragged forth from the water——"

"Enough, Signor!" said the Minister. "I seek not to penetrate any further into the circumstances attending your presence at the Camerino Mansion. Good night, Signor De Vere."

They separated,—the Minister returning to the Prefecture in blithe and triumphant spirits, for he had done a glorious night's work. He had captured the arch-conspirator the Count of Camerino—he had revenged himself upon Silvio for fleeing with his mistress—and he had punished that mistress by affecting to cast her off as if he cared no longer for her, and by sending her adrift in the streets as a symbol of what she might expect her eventual fate to be. As for Charles De Vere,—it was with mingled sorrow and horror in his heart at all that had just happened, that he bent his way towards the residence of the Marquis of Ortona.

CHAPTER XLIX.

LUCREZIA DI MIRANO.

WE must return to the beautiful Ciprina. This young lady was at first terribly affrighted when the chaise was stopped and she found herself (as she thought) once more thrown back into the power of the agents of the police: but it was with a sudden revulsion of joy that she hailed the announcement of her liberty. She had been annoyed at being separated from Silvio, whose handsome person and elegant manners had made a certain impression on her, notwithstanding that their acquaintance was so short; and she was likewise vexed at being separated from the faithful Fidelia. But these sources of affliction were speedily merged in her delight at finding herself emancipated from the power of the odious Chief of Police. She had money and jewels about her: and she had moreover at a banker's in Florence a considerable sum which she had paid into the hands of a banker at Naples (with orders to transfer it to the Tuscan capital) prior to her introduction to captivity in the Prefecture. Thus, though she understood full well the vindictive significance with which the Minister had thrown her upon the streets at that time of night, she could afford to laugh at the incident and to repel any foreboding fears in reference to the future.

She sped quickly along until two or three streets were threaded; for she deemed it just possible that the Prefect might repent of having suffered her to escape from his hands, and that he might send his agents in pursuit. She however soon relaxed her pace; and remembering the warning which the Prefect in his coward vindictiveness had given her—bidding her beware how she should be found in Naples at the rising of the morrow's sun—she resolved to depart with the least possible delay.

Ciprina was proceeding in the direction of a square where she knew there was a stand of vehicles waiting for the termination of the per-

performances at one of the principal theatres, when she stopped for an instant to make way for an elegantly-dressed lady who was alighting from her carriage at the entrance of an hotel. The equipage was a splendid one: the coachman and the two footmen were dressed in gorgeous liveries; and the appearance of the lady herself was most distinguished. An ejaculation indicative of recognition which burst from Ciprina's lips, met the ear of this lady; and stopping short, the latter exclaimed, "What! is it possible? You here and alone at this time of night!"

"Your ladyship therefore recollects me," said Ciprina, as she found her hand suddenly taken and pressed in that of the handsome and distinguished owner of the splendid equipage.

"Can I forget the kindness with which you treated me," asked the lady, "when we were fellow-passengers on board the steam-vessel from Malta? I expected you would have favoured me with a call in Naples, according to your promise——"

"It was my intention," answered Ciprina; "but a thousand little circumstances occurred——"

"Well, at last I meet you—and I am glad of it," said the lady. "But do tell me how it happens that you are alone in the streets at this time of night? My carriage is at your service to take you to your home. Ah! by the bye, I ought to have inquired after your husband——"

"With your ladyship's permission," interjected Ciprina, "I will enter the hotel with you for a few minutes."

"By all means!" exclaimed the lady, who seemed sincerely delighted at the proposal. "Shall my carriage wait for you?"

"No," replied Ciprina: and she accompanied the lady into the hotel, while the splendid equipage immediately rolled away.

We will here pause to say a few descriptive words in reference to the lady into whose society Ciprina was thus suddenly thrown. She was an Italian—but possessed light hair, blue eyes, and an exquisitely fair complexion. Her age might be about five-and-twenty. She was tall and superbly formed, her figure having a slight inclination to *emboîpoint*, but without any injury to the excellence of its symmetry. Her dress was elegant,—the low and tight-fitting corset, or rather stomacher, revealing more of a glowing bust than the strictest modesty would permit to be displayed. Her features were regular: the nose was perfectly straight, and beautifully formed: but there was a slightly sensuous expression in the configuration of the mouth and the softly rounded chin. Yet her face was remarkably interesting and pleasing,—indicative of good nature, and almost invariably with a winning half-smile upon it. Her hair, of a light golden auburn, was drawn back from her stainless forehead; and it clustered in myriads of ringlets upon her bare shoulders, which were of the purest whiteness. Altogether, she was a being whom it was impossible to survey without a feeling of interest; and, as we have before said, her appearance denoted the lady of distinction. We may, therefore, as well observe, without the maintenance of farther mystery, that she possessed the rank of a Marchioness—that her name was Lucrezia Mirano—and that she was a native of Tuscany. She was a widow, and enjoyed great wealth. As the reader has seen, Ciprina had been

enabled to render her some little service when they were fellow-passengers on board a steam-vessel; and the good-natured Marchioness of Mirano had not forgotten the attention she had thus received.

The noble lady had just returned from the theatre; and supper was served up on the table of her apartment in the hotel. She begged Ciprina to be seated,—treating her with the utmost kindness; for she fancied that there was something wrong, although she could not conjecture what it was. Ciprina had partaken of but little food throughout the day, for her mind had been agitated in respect to the escape which was to be attempted in the evening. She now therefore took her place at the table, and ate with a good appetite. She was gay and in good spirits on account of having fallen in with an acquaintance who treated her with so much affectionate attention.

"Your ladyship asked me after my husband," said Ciprina: "and I must frankly tell you, that I have left him. I have experienced some strange adventures: the Chief of the Neapolitan Police has made love to me—and to be brief, I find myself compelled to leave Naples before sunrise."

"Indeed?" ejaculated Lucrezia Mirano. "I should express my sympathy with you, my dear friend, did I not perceive that you are so gay, cheerful, and happy as to be far beyond the necessity of commiseration. But it is still possible that I may be enabled to render you a service; and if such be the case, you have only to tell me how I can further your views or interests. My purse is entirely at your disposal——"

"A thousand thanks, my dear Marchioness!" responded Ciprina: "but I am amply furnished with funds. All that I shall ask you to do for me is presently to order a postchaise——"

"Whither are you going?" inquired the Marchioness.

"To Florence," was the reply. "I am anxious to see the beautiful capital of Tuscany; and moreover I have money in the hands of a banker in that city."

"The coincidence is strange!" exclaimed Lucrezia Mirano. "You are aware that I am a native of Tuscany: indeed Florence is my birth-place—and it was my intention to set out to-morrow on my return homeward. I had ordered my travelling-carriage to be in readiness at ten o'clock in the forenoon: but as you say that you are bound to leave Naples before sun-rise, I will cheerfully set off a few hours earlier than I originally intended. You shall travel with me."

"Were it not for the disagreeable alteration which your ladyship must thus make in your plans entirely for my accommodation," observed Ciprina, "I should most cheerfully and thankfully accept that proposal."

"And if this be the only reason why you hesitate," rejoined the Marchioness, "you need not consider it for another instant. The sun does not rise at this Christmas season until a late hour; and if we take our departure between six and seven o'clock in the morning——"

"It will suit me excellently," said Ciprina; "and I again assure your ladyship of my sincerest gratitude."

"Talk not to me of gratitude," exclaimed the Marchioness: "the obligation is mutual. You

wish to depart from Naples in a comfortable and convenient manner, and you will have a seat in my travelling-carriage: I on the other hand shall obtain a pleasant and agreeable companion, in whom I have already experienced no small degree of interest, and to whom I am ready to proffer my friendship."

"And that proffer is accepted with fervour, and as warmly reciprocated," rejoined Ciprina.

The Marchioness rang the bell: and the summons was answered by a page dressed in plain clothes, and who presented one of the most perfect specimens of masculine beauty. His age was about twenty: he had no beard nor whiskers—but a finely pencilled black moustache contrasted with the vermilion hue of his lips and the pearly whiteness of his teeth. His hair was of raven darkness, soft and glossy as that of a woman. His slender figure seemed fitting to become a model for a statue of the Apollo Belvidere: his movements and attitudes were full of an unstudied grace: his manners were as polished as if he were a scion of the highest aristocracy instead of being a menial.

"Giulio," said the Marchioness, speaking in a kind tone, and yet with all the dignity of a mistress addressing a domestic, "you will be so good as to order the travelling-carriage to be in readiness at half-past six precisely. We shall proceed with rapidity, and the barouche may therefore follow at leisure. And remember, Giulio, the picture must be taken the greatest care of."

The handsome page bowed and withdrew. Ciprina, while affecting to be engaged with some fruit which she took from a crystal dish, had furtively watched Giulio's countenance; and she failed not to notice the impassioned look which for a moment he flung upon the Marchioness; but it was at the instant when the eyes of that lady were being withdrawn from his face, so that she herself probably observed it not.

"And now," said the Marchioness to Ciprina, "we will retire to rest, if you please—as it is late, and we have to rise early."

The Marchioness was occupying a spacious suite of apartments at the hotel; there was consequently a chamber in readiness to receive Ciprina; and one of her ladyship's maids was appointed specially to attend upon her. Ciprina sought her couch; and exhausted by the incidents of the evening, she speedily fell into a profound slumber. She was duly awakened at an early hour: all things requisite for her toilet were at hand; and she presently joined the Marchioness in the breakfast-room. This lady welcomed her with kindness; and it seemed as if the intimacy of friendship had already sprung up between them. The repast being over, they took their seats in the travelling-carriage, which was drawn by four post-horses. The handsome page and a lady's-maid sat on the box: the remainder of Lucrezia Mirano's domestic suite were to follow in the other equipage.

"And thus," said the Marchioness, as the travelling-carriage was rolling along the road outside the precincts of the Neapolitan capital,—“and thus, after being casually thrown together for a little while on board a steam-vessel, we are now reunited and journeying in each other's companionship as if we were friends of old standing!"

"And I feel," responded Ciprina, "as if our

acquaintance had been one of years instead of weeks! But will you tell me, my dear Marchioness——"

"Now let us understand each other," interrupted the noble lady. "You have already told me that you are henceforth to be known by the name of Ciprina; and that the name by which I first knew you must be regarded as having ceased to exist. Be it so! I call you Ciprina. You must call me Lucrezia: for if you address me by my patrician titles, the warmth of my friendship stands a chance of being chilled by the coldness of ceremony and formality."

"Well then, my dear Lucrezia," said Ciprina, "will you now tell me why you have lavished all these kindnesses upon me. Almost at the very outset, last night, I informed you that I had separated from my husband; and I fancied at the moment that there was a certain significance in your smile, as if you did not believe that he was my husband at all."

"Certainly I did not believe it," answered the Marchioness, with a gay laugh which displayed her magnificent teeth. "Without having been an intentional listener, I heard something which passed between you on board the steam-vessel, which convinced me that the nuptial knot had not been tied."

"And thus, when I presented myself to you last evening," continued Ciprina, "alone—at that late hour—and under circumstances which, to say the least of them, were peculiar if not suspicious—you at once received me as if I were with open arms!"

"But let me first of all ask you a question, my dear Ciprina," interrupted the Marchioness, with another sweet smile. "How was it that you did not hesitate at once to reveal the fact that you had separated from your husband—or I would rather say from him who had passed as your husband? How was it, in a word, that you feared not to present yourself to me in an equivocal position? Did you think that I was not very fastidious, and that I did not stand upon punctilio? Come, Ciprina, let the fullest confidence subsist between us, that we may know each other at once and thoroughly."

"Be it so," said Ciprina. "You have in your suite, Lucrezia, a young page of a remarkable beauty: and if you overheard something in reference to myself on board the steam-vessel, I on my part perceived something which made me suspect that the Marchioness Di Mirano, although a widowed lady, was not insensible to the sweet sentiment of love."

A slight flush for an instant passed over the exceedingly handsome countenance of Lucrezia; and then, with a gay laugh, she said, "You are right, Ciprina! And now we begin to understand each other!"

"I fancied," continued Ciprina, "that I had fathomed your real disposition; and hence the frankness with which I spoke to you last evening. I did not see the necessity of playing the part of a prude in order to ingratiate myself into your favour——"

"And you were right!" rejoined Lucrezia. "In a word, my dear friend, we tacitly understood each other, although we had not then arrived at explanations as we have now done. You are young

and beautiful; and I see that you do not mean to shut yourself up in a convent or lead the life of a nun. In respect to myself, I am rich—I am free—I have not a relation in the world who can in any way interfere with my pursuits or coerce me. You love pleasure, Ciprina; your disposition is breathed, so to speak, in your whole appearance. I also love pleasure; and there are no considerations which prevent me from enjoying it. Observe however! I do not outwardly scandalize the decencies of society: such a course would be an outrage to one's common sense. But to be a prude—no! that is a character which Lucrezia Di Mirano never can become!"

"Without saying anything offensive," resumed Ciprina,—"and indeed without meaning that the similitude reaches to the fullest extent, I may nevertheless observe that there is a singular resemblance between your style of personal beauty and that which so eminently characterized a lady of by-gone times who bore your Christian name. I saw a portrait of her in one of the galleries of Naples——"

"And would you believe it, Ciprina?" exclaimed the Marchioness; "my object in visiting Naples was to purchase, if possible, that very picture! I had heard of it often; I had read descriptions of it. From the lips of friends who had been in Naples, I frequently heard enough to excite my curiosity. I passed the summer, as you already know, in Paris; and there I saw a copy of the picture. I was struck with the resemblance which it bore to myself; and I was resolved, if possible, to possess the original, no matter at what cost. For this purpose I visited Naples, I saw the picture; and I was indeed far from being astonished that those friends who had spoken of it to me should proclaim that if I had originally set as the subject, the resemblance could not have been more perfect. And yet it was painted centuries before I was born——"

"Yes, the resemblance is indeed perfect!" said Ciprina. "There is the same profile—the same luxuriance of the golden hair—there are the same blue eyes—the same superbly modelled form——"

"Hush, hush, my dear friend!" said the Marchioness, smiling gaily, though at the same time a slight blush appeared upon her countenance: "you will render me quite vain with your compliments!"

"I am only speaking the truth," answered Ciprina; "for in personal beauty Lucrezia Borgia was the exact prototype of Lucrezia Mirano! But did you succeed in purchasing the picture?"

"I did," answered the Marchioness. "It cost an enormous sum; but, as I have already told you, I was determined if possible to possess it. At first the trustees of the gallery absolutely refused to dispose of it at any price; but when they perceived how remarkable was the resemblance which existed between myself and that portrait—and when they heard that by some strange coincidence I bore the same Christian name as the original of the picture—they began to relent: they thought it indeed only natural that I should long to have it, and that it would therefore be a species of cruelty to refuse the favour which I asked. Finally, an affirmative reply was yesterday conveyed to me: I paid the money—I received the picture—and the

business which brought me to Naples being thus settled, I resolved to return to my native Florence with the least possible delay. It was that same picture concerning which you heard me give Giulio such strict injunctions last evening."

"I congratulate you on having thus succeeded in your aim," said Ciprina. "And now perhaps it is the opportune moment for me to make another little revelation which will help to account for the frankness with which I last night addressed you and for the grounds on which I judged, when, as I said, I fancied I had fathomed your real disposition. I met you first of all on board the steam-vessel; and there a little incident led me to suspect that the handsome Giulio was something more to his mistress than a mere page. Shortly after my arrival at Naples, I beheld in the public gallery that picture of which we have been speaking. I was immediately struck with the extraordinary resemblance which you bore to the portrait: I looked in the catalogue—conceive my astonishment on discovering that it was the portrait of a princess who in her time was famous for her amours and her gallantries! Then I thought to myself that if ever the external appearance would be typical of the feelings and passions within, the glorious sunny beauty of the Marchioness of Mirano must tell its tale to some extent as accurately as that of Lucrezia Borgia!"

"Ah! but you did well, my dear Ciprina," said the Marchioness, with earnestness and emphasis, "to qualify your observation somewhat. For it is *only to a certain extent* that I can possibly resemble my personal prototype, the daughter of Pope Alexander VI. I should be insulting myself if I were to say more than a few words which are necessary to convey the assurance that I am utterly incapable of the crimes which were perpetrated by that infamous woman."

"Good heavens, my dear Lucrezia!" exclaimed Ciprina, "such an assurance is indeed most unnecessary from your lips!"

"Yes," continued the Marchioness, "I do not hesitate to avow that I may possess the frailties and the weaknesses, if such terms be appropriate, that characterized Lucrezia Borgia: but beyond that limit—no, Oh, no!"—and she shuddered visibly. "I have studied deeply the character of Lucrezia Borgia: I have read every history which treats of her career—I have procured copies of the old manuscripts deposited amongst the archives of Rome and Ferrara, which in any way bear reference to the incidents of her life. You cannot be surprised that I should have experienced such an ardent curiosity in reference to one whose Christian name I bear, and whose portrait I so much resemble. But there was a still deeper object in this study on my part——"

"And what may have been that object?" inquired Ciprina, much interested in the turn which the conversation had taken.

"To tell you the truth, my dear friend," continued the Marchioness, "I was affrighted when a few years ago I first learnt how wonderful was the resemblance which I bore to the famous, or rather infamous Lucrezia Borgia. I was all the more terrified at the thought that even to my very Christian name did this resemblance extend. I asked myself whether it were possible that in the course of time I could become still more iden-

tified with the reality of that character, and whether my own career could to a still greater extent be regarded as a fulfilment of a prototypical prediction? Then it was that I began to study the life of Lucrezia Borgia. I wished to ascertain whether she were wilfully and deliberately wicked, and that she committed crimes which any other person similarly situated at the time might have easily avoided; or whether they were the inevitable necessities, so to speak, of her own position. I sought to discern whether she were a criminal without justification, or whether she were the victim of irresistible circumstances."

"And the result of your investigation," said Ciprina, "was that——"

"She was a wicked, wilful, deliberate criminal," answered the Marchioness; "and that not one single deed of horror and turpitude which she committed was actually necessitated by her position. Crime may have suited her convenience: but still it was in no sense so imperative as to constitute an extenuation. Well then, my mind grew tranquil—it threw off the trouble which had oppressed it; for I felt that though there was an identity of name and a remarkable personal resemblance, yet that neither this identity nor similitude need extend any further, and that it would be my own deliberate wilful fault if there were any parallelism, so to speak, between our careers and our destinies."

In this manner did the ladies converse for a considerable time after the travelling-carriage had issued from the precincts of Naples. There was now a pause, which was however speedily broken by the Marchioness, who said, "You have not yet told me, Ciprina, what are your plans and what are your views in visiting Florence?"

"In one sense, my dear Lucrezia, I resemble yourself," answered Ciprina: "I have no relations and no friends who can exercise any control or coercion over my proceedings: I am altogether my own mistress. I am young in life; and my object is to enjoy it fully. I seek for happiness and pleasure according to my whims, fancies, or inclinations. When I thought of leaving Naples, I had no particular view in visiting Florence, beyond the idea that it was a city of delight which would prove agreeable to me as a place of residence, at least for a time."

"I am glad you have dealt thus candidly with me," said Lucrezia. "Will you be my guest at Florence? I possess a palace in the city itself, and a beautiful villa in the Vale of Arno. You shall be entirely your own mistress; and if you choose to be alone, you may live at the palace when I am at the villa—or you may regard the villa as your own when I am at my town-mansion."

"I should not wish to be separated from you," answered Ciprina.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Marchioness, gaily and significantly, "there may be occasions when it may suit your convenience as well as mine to be alone—or at least I mean to have the fullest opportunity of throwing a veil of mystery over one's proceedings. But when you reach Florence you will see whether you like my palace and my villa; and I can assure you that all the attentions which friendship is willing to bestow, and which wealth enables its possessor to afford, shall be shown to-

wards you. Live with me as long as such an existence is agreeable to you—and the longer the better. If you leave me, it will not be through any alteration of demeanour on my part; for such as you now find me, so shall I always prove. I have taken a liking to you: I have conceived a friendship—an affectionate interest—a sisterly love I may even denominate it: and I am sure we shall be happy together."

"Oh! it will indeed be my fault if it should prove otherwise!" exclaimed Ciprina: and the two ladies warmly shook each other by the hand.

There now seemed to be a thorough understanding between them. The Marchioness Di Mirano sought no explanation in reference to Ciprina's antecedents; and Ciprina gave none. In reference to herself, however, Lucrezia volunteered some particulars of her own history.

"My parents," she said, "belonged to a noble race, but they had fallen into comparative poverty. I was an only child; and as I grew up, my father (for my mother died in my girlhood) studied to form for me what is termed a brilliant alliance. Accordingly, when I was sixteen, I was introduced to the Marquis Di Mirano, who immediately began to pay me attentions which I first looked upon as the innocent unmeaning caresses that a good-natured old man might bestow upon a child. For he was at least sixty years of age—and I, as I tell you, was sixteen. I was therefore one day very much taken by surprise when he asked if I would become his wife? I thought he was jesting; and I ran laughing to my father to tell him of the excellence of the joke. My father however, assured me that it was no jest at all; for that I was to accompany the Marquis to the altar. He proceeded to represent that the Marquis was immensely rich—that he possessed estates producing a princely revenue—a palace in the city, a villa in the Vale, and a chateau in the country—that he had no heirs nor relations to look coldly upon me or make me unhappy—and that it rested with myself to become a titled bride, with the certainty of soon being a rich widow, envied and courted by all fashionable society. I listened with interest: my heart was free—I did not know what love was—I had therefore no positive sacrifice of feeling to make. I was dazzled by the prospects held out; and I gave my assent. I married the old Marquis; and a year afterwards I found myself a widow. My father died at about the same time. I was thus altogether my own mistress; and I resolved to remain so. As you may easily suppose, I soon received numerous offers of marriage; and many would have been considered by the world to be advantageous alliances: but I refused them all. I have never known what love is; and I do not think that I shall ever experience the sentiment in the same way that others have experienced it, and as I have read of it in poems, novels, and romances."

"Be not too sure, my dear Lucrezia!" said Ciprina: "the heart is sometimes surprised at a moment when the presence of the little god with his bow and arrow is least suspected."

"I have no fear," replied the Marchioness, with a smile; "and nothing should induce me to surrender up the freedom which I now enjoy. I will not stand the chance of giving my fortune to be dissipated by a spendthrift, nor my feelings to be

outraged by a libertine. I have whims and caprices in respect to the other sex—but no susceptibility of permanent passion. You have discovered, and I have confessed, that I am not virtuous: but this is the tenour of existence which I hope to lead for many a long year to come.”

Ciprina herself was not virtuous: but still she could not help gazing with a momentary feeling of astonishment upon her new friend who unhesitatingly avowed her libertinage, but who nevertheless, by her speech, her look, and her manner, threw over it so exquisite a gloss that it did not look like profligacy or depravity. Yet Ciprina's astonishment quickly passed away, as the conviction rushed into her mind that there was after all very little difference, if any, between her own disposition and that of Lucrezia Mirano.

The distance from Naples to Florence is about two hundred and fifty miles; and though Italian travelling is none of the fleetest, yet the liberal expenditure of money ensured relays of the best post-horses which each successive station could furnish; and there were no unnecessary halts by the way. Two nights were passed upon the road; and at length the equipage entered the Tuscan capital. Ciprina was prepared to find Lucrezia's mansion a handsome one; but she had little anticipated the degree of splendour to which all the details of the establishment reached. The structure itself veritably deserved the name of a *palazzo*: it was furnished in a style of palatial magnificence; and the hosts of servants of all descriptions seemed innumerable. The gardens attached to the palace were laid out after the fashion of those at Versailles, near Paris. In the pleasure-grounds there were water-works and fountains, pavilions and arbours, groups of exquisitely modelled statues, avenues of orange trees, conservatories, and green-houses. As we have already hinted, the interior of the palace was sumptuous to a degree: no expense had been spared in the appointments of the numerous suites of apartments; and everywhere within those walls the most admirable and interesting works of art might be seen. Statues and pictures, objects of virtù and a profusion of the costliest nick-nacks, met the eye on all sides. All these things were entirely to Ciprina's taste; and she thus received another proof of the resemblance which subsisted between her own disposition and that of her new friend. It was left to Ciprina to select for herself the suite of apartments which she chose to occupy; and a numerous band of domestics were assigned to her special service. Particular equipages were also appointed for her own individual use when she chose to separate her proceedings and arrangements from those of the Marchioness; and thus everything was done to fulfil the various promises which Lucrezia had made her during the journey. It appeared to be the realization of a beautiful dream!

On the morrow the picture which the Marchioness had purchased at Naples, was put up in the gallery. It represented Lucrezia Borgia in an elegant costume voluptuously displaying the rich contours of her bust—a book in her hand—but her countenance turned in a manner to reveal a full view of its beauty, while its expression was that of a soft sensuous significance.

“I shall never think of that portrait,” said

Ciprina, “as being intended to represent the Pope's daughter. I shall always look upon it, my dear Lucrezia, as the portrait of yourself. Ah! and you are now dressed, too, in a style which fully bears out the resemblance! Pray take a book in your hand—place yourself next to these evergreens so as to form a background—and now turn your face towards me, just as that countenance seems to be looking out of the canvass. There! that smile too—that involuntary smile that you gave—Oh! the resemblance is indeed marvellously striking!”

This little scene took place after the withdrawal of the domestics who had hung up the picture, and when the two ladies were alone together in the gallery. And Ciprina was right. The resemblance was indeed wonderful; and a stranger unacquainted with the facts, could not have failed to imagine that it was veritably the portrait of Lucrezia Di Mirano which was suspended there.

CHAPTER L.

THE CONFESSION.

WE must now return to the Count of Camerino and his wretched son, whom we left at the instant when they were thrown together inside the chaise which the Chief of the Police had caused to be stopped that it might convey them both to the Prefecture. It would be difficult to conceive a state of mind more terribly harrowing, more poignant in its excruciating tortures than that which was endured by Silvio. All his various projects, his hopes, and his expectations had been shattered and levelled with the dust. Separated from Ciprina and arrested by the police, he had found himself forced suddenly to fall back upon the parricidal idea that by surrendering up his sire to the grasp of the law, he might ensure his own safety as well as the heritage of the paternal estates. But this last resource was likewise destroyed, as a project of such stupendous infamy only too well deserved to be!—and all his guilt was made known to his sire—all the satanic wickedness of his conduct throughout its black details was revealed to the knowledge of that outraged parent!

The miserable young man sank down in the chaise, and grovelled at the feet of the Count, murmuring, in the most piteous accents, “Forgive me, father!—forgive me!”

“Silence, unnatural boy!” sternly replied the Count of Camerino. “There are offences beyond all pardon—and yours are of that character! Oh, the execrable refinement of cruelty which has thrown us thus together!”

“Father,” said Silvio, his voice sounding hoarse and unnatural, “if you have a weapon about you, plunge it into my heart—for I am unfit to live!”

“Wretch!” cried the Count: “would you seek to make me as vile and iniquitous as you are? I have no weapon: but even if I had, you would be safe with me—for it is not my hand that shall avenge all the wrongs that I have sustained. Miserable boy! you are in the terrible grasp of the law; and even if by any miracle you were to escape from it, yet heaven itself would wreak a



terrible vengeance upon your head! And now address me not again. Let it seem as if the stone wall separating two dungeons had already sprung up between us: for so it will presently be!"

"And perhaps, father," said Silvio, "the next time we meet, it will be upon the platform of the scaffold—and then—Oh! then will you refuse me your forgiveness?"

Were it not dark inside the vehicle, Silvio might have entertained a momentary hope that his prayer would be granted; for the Count's lips quivered, and his broad chest rose and fell with the violence of the emotions that were agitating within him. But quickly exerting an effort over himself, he subdued those feelings—he crushed them as it were beneath the iron heel of the strongest resolution; and he said, "Silvio, it will only be when we stand together upon the threshold of death that I can forgive you! Yea—at the instant when death shall be about to separate us—

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whether it be on the point of striking both, or only one—then, Silvio, may you kneel at my feet and I will forgive you—but not till then!"

The young Viscount groaned: but he said no more. Throwing himself into a corner on the seat opposite to that where his father was placed, he pulled his hat over his eyes, so that the lamp-light flashing into the vehicle should not reveal his countenance to his sire, nor afford a chance of their eyes meeting. Thus the chaise now proceeded, in silence so far as the prisoners were concerned; and the gate of the Prefecture was presently reached. The vehicle passed under the gloomy frowning archway: it entered the outer court-yard—and the gates were then shut. The *sbirri* opened the door of the chaise, and bade the prisoners alight. The Count was the first to descend; and he said to the officials, "If you have the slightest scintillation of mercy in your hearts, I entreat you to separate me at once from that miserable young man!"

"Father," said Silvio, in the wildest tones of the most passionate grief, as he threw himself at his sire's feet, "I beseech and implore that you will forgive me! Oh, for heaven's sake, forgive me!"

"No—not now!" sternly exclaimed the Count; and he was then hurried away by the guards in one direction, while Silvio was dragged off in another.

Leaving these two unhappy beings in the Prefecture, we must return to Charles De Vere, who in the meantime had proceeded to the mansion of the Marquis of Ortona. That nobleman was on the point of retiring to rest when the visit of our hero was announced. He at once received De Vere; and the moment he entered the room where the Marquis awaited him, the nobleman perceived by his countenance that some fearful calamity had occurred. The truth was quickly made known. Silvio's last act of villany had been the betrayal of his sire—retribution had however overtaken the guilty young man—and both father and son were prisoners! Tears rolled down the cheeks of Charles as he told the tale, and of the Marquis as he listened to it; and the latter, clasping his hands, exclaimed, "Oh, what a tissue of calamities and horrors!—and what heavy misfortunes have fallen upon the head of my most valued friend the Count of Camerino!"

"Here is a packet," said Charles, "which I was charged to deliver to your lordship. It was given to me at a moment when the unfortunate Count expected to succeed in accomplishing his escape from Naples; and therefore whether it be now of any use, under these painfully altered circumstances, for your lordship to inspect its contents, remains to be seen."

The Marquis of Ortona broke the seal of the envelope, which was found to contain another sealed packet, and likewise a paper covered with writing. On the envelope of the sealed packet were only these words—"To be opened after my death."

The paper to which we have alluded contained memoranda of instructions which the unfortunate writer the Count of Camerino had wished to be carried out in case of his escape from Naples. They chiefly bore reference to his establishment in the capital—to the effect that his mansion was to be shut up, and the domestics to be dismissed, some with pensions and others with liberal pecuniary presents.

"But now," said the Marquis, "the mansion will doubtless be confiscated by the Government: yet in respect to the domestics my poor friend's wishes shall be fully carried out. This packet," he continued, alluding to the one on which were written the instructions that it was not to be opened until after the Count's death, "shall be placed amongst my private papers. Alas! I fear that the day is not far distant when the seal of that envelope must be broken!"

"Do you really apprehend, my lord," inquired Charles, with a sad tightening at the heart, "that the utmost rigour of the law will be brought to bear upon the Count of Camerino?"

The Marquis shook his head gloomily, as much as to imply that there was no hope; and turning away to conceal his emotions—for the veteran was weeping plentifully—he locked up the sealed packet in a bureau.

Charles presently took his leave; and departing from the Marquis of Ortona's mansion, he looked about for a vehicle to take him to the Embassy. As he was proceeding along the street, he beheld Father Falconara come forth from a house which the youth was passing at the time. The priest recognised Charles; and approaching him, said in a mournful voice, "How does my benefactor, the unfortunate Count of Camerino, bear the heavy calamities which have fallen upon his head?"

"Alas!" replied De Vere, "your reverence has yet to learn the particulars of the crowning misfortune. The Count is a prisoner—betrayed into the hands of the police by his own son!"

An ejaculation of grief had burst from the lips of Father Falconara on hearing that the Count was a prisoner: but it was speedily followed by one of indescribable horror on being informed that by his own son he was betrayed.

"No, no!" said the priest, "tell me not this, Signor De Vere! It would be sufficient to make one mistrust the whole human race to be told that such an infamy had been perpetrated!"

"It is but too true," said Charles: "yes, only too true! Oh, it is impossible to conceive what must now be the anguish of mind experienced by him whom you love as your benefactor!"

"And where is the Count?" asked the priest. "I will go to him—I will seek to comfort him—we will kneel and pray together——"

"He is doubtless at the Prefecture," interrupted Charles: "for the Chief of the Police was present upon the spot when the guilty son and the unhappy father were thrown together. Indeed, it appeared to be with a horrible malignant joy that the Chief of the Police proclaimed to the Count the black turpitude of his son!"

"Ah! the Chief of the Police!" said Father Falconara, as if suddenly struck by some idea.

"Yes," replied Charles: "and according to all accounts, he bears not a good repute for humanity."

"The Chief of the Police!" again repeated Father Falconara; and De Vere was smitten by the singular expression which the pale handsome countenance of the young ecclesiastic now wore.

Then there was a pause of some moments.

"The Chief of the Police!" for the third time said Father Falconara, as if in a sort of dismayed musing.

"Something is passing in your mind!" exclaimed Charles; "what is it? Do you possibly possess any influence in that quarter?—is there aught that you can do towards saving the life of your benefactor?"

The young priest did not immediately answer Charles; but he still stood musing as if under some dismaying influence, or as if his thoughts were touching upon a sphere wherein he dared not let them range, but whence he could not altogether keep them back. It was not an idiotic vacancy which his countenance expressed: there was a wild and sinister intelligence in it. It was evident that something surpassingly strange was agitating in the mind of that young priest. Charles contemplated him with a species of awful curiosity, mingled with the most painful suspense: and at length he said, "For heaven's sake, if you can do anything on behalf of the unfortunate Count, let it be done speedily!"

"Yes!" exclaimed the priest! "it shall be done speedily!"—and he rushed away, leaving Charles standing in the middle of the street, transfixed to the spot, wondering whether Falconara had really any plan in his mind, or whether he was altogether demented.

But in a few moments our hero beheld the priest rapidly emerging again from the obscurity into which he had seemed to plunge as he rushed in that frantic manner along the street. He was now walking at a slower pace in comparison; but still it was a hurried one. As he accosted Charles the latter saw that his face was more than usually pale: indeed it was of a deadly whiteness; and his large black eyes were shining with an unnatural brilliancy.

"I'm going to the Prefecture of Police," he said, in a deep hollow tone. "Those who penetrate thither, are not always certain of coming forth again at will. Go to the Marquis of Ortona—he is a friend of the Count's—and he will befriend me if you assure him that the enterprise in which I am embarking has for its object the salvation of the Count's life!"

"And what do you wish the Marquis to do?" inquired Charles anxiously.

"I wish you and the Marquis to proceed presently together into the neighbourhood of the Prefecture. If at the expiration of one hour I do not rejoin you there, you may conclude that I have experienced treacherous treatment—that I am a captive and destined for eternal immurement in a dungeon, unless you both hasten forward to deliver me. Therefore, I say, if at the expiration of one hour from this moment I do not join the Marquis and yourself in the neighbourhood of the gate of the Prefecture, do you ring at that gate and demand that Father Falconara be at once set at liberty! The Chief of the Police will not dare refuse; and thus my safety will be secured. And in assuring my safety, you will secure the life and liberty of the Count of Camerino! I trust to you, Signor De Vere, to fulfil my instructions precisely as I have given them."

"I will—Oh, believe me I will!" cried our hero, overjoyed at the hope which had been held out in reference to the unfortunate Count.

Father Falconara wrung De Vere's hand with the convulsive violence which emanated from the strength of his emotions; and he again hurried away—while Charles began to retrace his steps towards the Marquis of Ortona's mansion.

Meanwhile the Chief of Police, triumphant in the night's work which he had accomplished, was sitting down to supper in his luxuriously furnished apartment. He had no guests at his table on the occasion: he ate and drank like a man bent upon enjoying himself after having satisfactorily disposed of a considerable amount of business. He quaffed the sparkling champagne; and ever and anon he muttered to himself, "I care not for the loss of my beautiful mistress, since I am so signally avenged upon him who eloped with her! But I must be cautious in the presence of this fascinating beverage," he presently added, as he held his glass up to the light so as to observe the colour and clearness of the wine; "or it will do me a mischief as last year it did."

We must here explain that some eighteen months back the Chief of the Police had indulged

so deeply in the juices of the grape, that a serious illness was the consequence; and at one time it was thought that he could not possibly survive it. Then, deeming himself to be on his death-bed, he was haunted by all the terrors arising from an ill-spent life—a life that had been marked by more than one deed of turpitude only too well calculated thus to trouble his conscience. But he had recovered; and instead of taking warning from the remorseful feelings which had then agitated him and rendered the prospect of death terrible, he had gradually glided again into his iniquitous career.

To return to the immediate thread of our story. The Chief of Police, having quaffed as much champagne as he fancied that he dare drink, rose from the table and was about to seek his couch, when the ringing of the bell at the gate of the Prefecture made him linger with the idea that some new call upon his attention might possibly be about to transpire. A domestic presently entered, to announce that a priest who gave the name of Father Falconara, desired an interview with his Excellency.

"Father Falconara!" echoed the Minister, for a moment looking surprised: but instantaneously recovering himself, he added, "Let the reverend gentleman be introduced."

The ecclesiastic was accordingly conducted into the Minister's presence; and he gave the usual benediction, which the great official received with an air of assumed humility.

"Be seated, holy sir," said the Chief of the Police; "and tell me for what purpose I am favoured with a visit from your reverence at this hour."

"Let me crave your attention for a short time," said Father Falconara. "I have just been attending the death-bed of a penitent sinner of whom your lordship has some knowledge—I mean the man Bardi."

"Indeed!" said the Chief of the Police; and his countenance became for a moment pale. "You surely do not mean that the unfortunate man who was just now so seriously wounded by a prisoner while effecting his escape—"

"Yes, my lord—I allude to that man," responded Father Falconara.

"And you were called in to give him absolution?" exclaimed the Minister, becoming still more pale than before. "The circumstance is remarkable! The coincidence extraordinary!"

"Perhaps, my lord, it was providential!" said the ecclesiastic impressively: and the Chief of the Police evidently understood his meaning, for he trembled for a moment.

Then there was silence for nearly a minute in that room.

"And the poor fellow is dead?" observed the Minister, regaining his self-possession. "I knew that the injury he had sustained was very serious: but still, when he came to his senses and brought that he might be taken home to his wife and children—and when the surgeon gave his assent to the removal—I certainly fancied there was a chance of his recovery—"

"No, my lord," interrupted the ecclesiastic: "that man is no more! Scarcely half-an-hour has elapsed since Bardi breathed his last, having confessed all his sins and received absolution!"

"And thus, Father Falconara," said the Minis-

ter of Police, with a sombre look, "you have received a fearful corroboration of the tale which I told you some eighteen months back, when I feared that I myself was stretched upon my death-bed and when you came to give me the consolations of religion?"

"Yes, my lord," continued the priest: "the guilty and unfortunate Bardi has within the past hour given me a terrible corroboration of the history which I had previously learnt from your lips. But let us put *him* out of the question: because even though you can full well conjecture what he said to me on his death-bed, yet must it be held sacred so far as he himself is concerned; for it is under the seal of implicit secrecy that the priest receives a confession of the dying penitent! Pardon me, my lord, if I have intruded upon you at so late an hour: but those circumstances to which I have alluded, brought you back into my mind—and then I was struck by the remissness of my conduct in never having again visited you since the day when I gave you absolution."

"It was barely necessary, holy sir," answered the Chief of the Police; "for on the following day my illness took a sudden turn, and I was speedily out of danger. Nevertheless, believe me, I am always glad to receive the visits of the priesthood: for your holy Order is one of the main supports of the throne——"

"If I have called on the present occasion," interjected Father Falconara, somewhat abruptly—for he chose not to receive the credit of a loyalty which he did not deserve,—"it is to confer with your lordship seriously for a brief space. May I hope that the exhortations which I addressed unto your Excellency when you deemed that you lay upon your death-bed——"

"Now to speak the truth, holy father," said the Minister, "I am by no means sorry that you have come; for I may address you upon a subject which I dare not touch upon with any other living person. To be candid, I sleep not well at night: I am haunted by the recollection of that dreadful deed——"

"Speak to me as a friend," said Father Falconara; "and remember that you should also speak to me as if I had never before heard a single syllable relative to the deed to which you are alluding: for a priest must have no memory for whatsoever was told him when executing the holiest of his functions and administering extreme unction."

"I understand you," said the Minister: "and I would fain learn how it is that my conscience still troubles me notwithstanding the absolution which you gave me?"

"Describe how it troubles you," said Father Falconara.

"My dreams at night reproduce, with super-added horror, if possible, that terrible scene——"

"What scene?" asked the priest.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Minister, almost impatiently, "that scene of murder which was perpetrated——"

"Where?" demanded the ecclesiastic.

"In the ruins of St. Nicholas: and not for worlds," added the Chief of the Police, with a shudder, "would I pass by those dilapidated walls after night-fall!"

"Unhappy man!" exclaimed the priest: "what think you that you would see?"

"What should I see? The gory mangled form of my unfortunate uncle—the old man whom I enticed thither, and whom with the assistance of one of my creatures, Bardi——"

"Bardi?" said the priest. "Have I heard that name before?"

"Yes, yes—you know it!—and wonderful is the coincidence which has placed you in a position of twice hearing a confession of the same crime! Why do you pretend that you had not heard the name before?"

"Put all that out of the question," said Father Falconara. "What were you telling me?—That in the ruins of St. Nicholas you assassinated your own relative——"

"Yes—you know it! It was to possess his fortune, which I knew that he meant to bequeath to another——"

"And you poured forth his blood?" said the ecclesiastic: "you assassinated him?—and you would tremble to pass near that spot after night-fall?"

"Yes: for beneath the grass which grows in dark luxuriance amidst these ruins," said the Minister, "the corpse was interred—the old man's corpse! Ten years have elapsed since then—but if the soil were dug up the bones would be found! And Oh! in imagination that skeleton is often evoked from its unhalloved grave, to stand by the side of my couch—to stretch its fleshless arm over and to startle me horribly from my troubled sleep——"

"Unhappy man!" again ejaculated the priest. "But how was the crime concealed?"

"Who knew of it save myself and my accomplice Bardi, who, as you tell me, has so lately rendered up his breath, having to your ears confessed——"

"Well, well," said the priest: "none knew of it but yourself and your accomplice? The corpse was buried—the crime was concealed! But how obtained you possession of the murdered man's property?"

"A tale readily invented—that he suddenly went to Corsica—that there he died—then forged certificates of death and burial were in time produced—they gave me his fortune as heir-at-law—But why do you make me recapitulate facts which are so well known to you? Is it to punish me? Tell me, holy father—why I am thus haunted by that spectre when my conscience ought to be absolved of the crime?"

"Why do I make you recapitulate those facts?" exclaimed Father Falconara: and now a strange alteration took place in the whole manner, look, tone, and bearing of the young ecclesiastic. "It was to elicit from your lips the confession that you are a murderer!"

"But was not that confession made eighteen months ago?" asked the Minister, trembling, he scarcely knew why.

"Yes," said the ecclesiastic! "but *then* it was a confession made to me when I visited you as a priest and the seal of secrecy was upon my lips! Now it is a confession which you have made to me as a friend—and I accuse you, my lord, of the foul crime of assassination!"

Father Falconara started up from his chair as he thus spoke; and the Chief of Police, likewise springing up from his own seat, exclaimed, "What

mean you?—what am I to understand by this strange conduct on your part? I sought your ghostly advice——”

“You are not in the confessional—neither are you stretched upon a bed which may become the couch of death!” exclaimed the ecclesiastic. “It is man speaking to man—not penitent to priest! Your confession is open, and no seal of secrecy is upon my lips! My lord, I accuse you of the foul crime of murder! There are evidences of the deed—the skeleton beneath the ruins—the forged certificates! Yes—there are all the proofs!—and I now hold you answerable to the criminal law of this country!”

The most astute persons in the world may sometimes be caught off their guard—the most cunning and wily may occasionally commit themselves—and those who are ordinarily most famous for having their wits constantly about them, may on some occasion or another lose their shrewd foreseeing qualities. Thus was it with the Minister of Police on the present occasion. He had made a tremendous mistake—he had been guilty of a fearful error: but how could he possibly suppose that the pious, sedate, retiring young priest had with a rare ingenuity been spreading a net to ensnare him? Startled into the consciousness of the awful position in which he had placed himself, the Chief of the Police now gazed on Father Falconara with a look of mingled horror and consternation; and the young priest, seizing him by the collar of his coat, exclaimed, “I arrest your lordship in the name of the law! I denounce you as a murderer!”

“This is madness!” suddenly ejaculated the Prefect, as with a violent effort he released himself from the grasp which the young ecclesiastic had fixed upon him. “Keep off!—down upon your knees—listen to the terms I myself am about to dictate: or else——”

The Minister did not finish the sentence: but suddenly producing a pistol from a bureau which was near at hand, he presented it towards Falconara’s head.

“Beware of what you are doing, miserable man,” cried the priest, shrieking not from the weapon which was thus levelled at him. “I may be in your power—you may kill me, but I shall not die unrevenged! You may thrust me into a dungeon—but it would not be long ere an account would be demanded of me at your hands! Think you that having undertaken such a task as that which has brought me hither, and knowing how desperate your character is, I adopted no precaution—Ah! hear you that ring at the gate? Rest assured that the Marquis of Ortona and Signor De Vere, one of the attachés to the English Embassy, have come to the Prefecture to inquire for Father Falconara!”

“Am I to understand,” said the Minister of Police, slowly suffering the muzzle of the pistol to sink towards the ground, while an expression of ghastliness again came over his countenance, as if he felt that the toils of the net in which he was ensnared were closing in more and more upon him, —“Am I to understand that you have revealed to the Marquis of Ortona and to that young Englishman the fearful narrative which under the seal of secrecy was confided to your ears? But no!” ejaculated the Chief of the Police; “I am a fool to

ask the question!—for you would not have dared to violate the sanctity of your priestly obligation in such a manner!”

“No—I am incapable of it!” answered the ecclesiastic: “but I have appointed the Marquis and that young Englishman to watch over my life and liberty this night! I intend to offer you terms: I can propose a means by which the tale of your foul crime may remain a secret until the end,—buried as deeply in my heart as the skeleton is buried deep beneath the ruins of St. Nicholas!”

“And what terms are those which your reverence proposes?” asked the Minister.

“Life for life!” replied Falconara. “If by keeping your dreadful secret I save you from the scaffold, which is the murderer’s doom,—you, on your side, must surrender up unto me some one whom in your heart you have already doomed to the scaffold!”

“Ah!” ejaculated the Chief; “to whom do you allude? Perhaps to one of those who this night——”

“Yes,” rejoined Falconara: “I allude to the Count of Camerino. He is my benefactor—the only friend whom I possess on earth: to him am I indebted for everything! I have resolved to save him, even though by the adoption of a course which, believe me, has done no mean violence to my feelings, though I have outraged no law either moral or religious. Now, my lord, you understand me! Let the door of the dungeon open for the Count of Camerino; and I swear by the most sacred, solemn, and binding of oaths that never again from my lips shall go forth a syllable in reference to the hideous topic of your great guilt!”

“But you are asking something,” said the Prefect, who was still much agitated,—“you are asking something which it is next to impossible for me to grant!”

“Hark, my lord! again the ringing at the gate of the Prefecture!” exclaimed Father Falconara. “My friends are demanding me!”

“Are you sure?” asked the Prefect—and he looked earnestly on the priest’s countenance; for the unscrupulous villain thought to himself that if it were not really as Falconara represented, he would hurry him off to a dungeon whence he would take care that he should never come forth alive.

“I understand what is passing in your thoughts,” said the priest: “but heaven be thanked, I am not in your power! A third time they ring!”

A domestic entered, saying, as he addressed the Prefect, “May it please your Excellency, two gentlemen are at the gate, who insist upon seeing Father Falconara. Vainly have I assured them that his reverence is engaged with your lordship—they persist——”

“Tell them,” interrupted the Prefect, “that Father Falconara shall join them in a few minutes.”

The domestic retired; and the young priest said firmly and decisively, “Now, my lord, what is your decision?—for there can be no more tarrying. It is useless to argue and reason: my mind is made up. I came hither for a special purpose—and if you were to offer me the wealth of the Indies, or all the worldly advantages that could

possibly be heaped together as a bribe, I could not be deterred from my course. In a word, therefore, I demand the life and liberty of the Count of Camerino—or I denounce the Chief of the Police as the assassin of his own uncle!"

The Minister reflected for upwards of a minute. What could he do? He dared not murder the young ecclesiastic: he dared not send him off to a fortress; for it was not so easy to deal with the priesthood as it was with laymen and civilians. Should he boldly refuse Falconara's demand, and trust to his good fortune to extricate him from the menacing consequences that might ensue? But the Minister knew how fearfully unpopular he was, and that at the very first whisper of his having committed a deed of assassination on the person of his own uncle, the whole populace would rise and demand justice against him. The Chief therefore found himself compelled to submit to the condition which Father Falconara imposed upon him.

"I know that the Marquis of Ortona," he said, "has long been an intimate friend of the Count of Camerino: I know likewise that circumstances have rendered the young Englishman De Vere acquainted with his lordship, and perhaps interested in his behalf. I therefore presume that even though they may be ignorant of the means of coercion which you are exercising over me, they are nevertheless aware of the object of your visit?"

"They know that I have come on behalf of the Count of Camerino," replied Father Falconara. "Conduct the business as you think fit—make a merit of necessity—give it the aspect of a virtue—do what you will—I care not, so long as my object is gained and my benefactor is restored to freedom!"

"Ah! you give me this license?" exclaimed the Chief of the Police. "It is well: I will avail myself of it. But do you keep your countenance, and neither by look nor word contradict me in what I shall say."

The Minister then rang the bell; and when the domestic answered the summons, he said, "Request the two gentlemen who are waiting below, to come hither."

In a few moments the Marquis of Ortona and Charles De Vere were introduced to the apartment, where they found the Prefect and Father Falconara. The former was now all urbanity and politeness—while the latter wore an expression of joyous hopefulness on his countenance; so that the nobleman and our young hero felt their own hearts relieved of much of the load which had hitherto been sitting heavily upon them.

"The influence of this holy man," said the Minister of Police, indicating the ecclesiastic, "has prevailed with me; and I cannot refuse the boon which on his knees he has demanded: for Oh! it is not a light thing which can bring down a minister of the Gospel to a suppliant posture in the presence of a minister of the law. But you have knelt to me, Father Falconara—have you not?"

"I scarcely know what means of entreaty and intercession I have adopted," replied the young priest; "but this I do know—and for this shall I be grateful unto the end of my life—that your Excellency has granted the boon, and the Count of Camerino is about to be restored to perfect freedom!"

Ejaculations of joy burst forth from the lips of the Marquis of Ortona and Charles De Vere as they received this announcement. They seized the hands of the young priest and pressed them warmly: they then made acknowledgment of the generosity of the Minister—for in such a light did they regard his conduct.

The reader may have already seen that the Neapolitan Chief of Police was endowed with a considerable amount of discretionary power in the exercise of the functions of his high office. Indeed, with a word could be bind or loosen; and in most respects he was completely irresponsible for his proceedings—though as a matter of course he had not the power to decree the fulness of pardon; for that was a prerogative belonging to the Sovereign alone. Such authority however as the Prefect could and might exercise, he was now about to demonstrate, according to the demand of Father Falconara. Again ringing the bell, the Minister said to the domestic who answered the summons, "Let the Count of Camerino be at once brought hither."

There was now a deep silence of some minutes in the apartment where this scene was taking place; and as the Chief of the Police pursued his reflections, he was struck by the fact that not a single syllable had been spoken on behalf of the Viscount Silvio—not the faintest effort had been made to save that young nobleman. And the Minister comprehended why the name of that unprincipled villain was thus consigned to utter silence, if not to oblivion!

In a few minutes the door of the apartment opened; and the Count of Camerino was ushered in by a couple of police-agents. The Minister made a sign, and those agents at once withdrew. The nobleman glanced round in astonishment upon those friendly faces which met his eyes,—Father Falconara's, the Marquis of Ortona's, Charles De Vere's: then he looked at the Prefect, and he was struck by the air of bland affability which that official deemed it expedient to assume.

"My friend! my benefactor!" exclaimed the young priest, hastening forward and throwing his arms around the Count's neck: "you are free! you are free!"

"Is this so?"—and for a few instants the nobleman was almost completely overwhelmed by his emotions.

He embraced his three friends one after another; and the Marquis of Ortona said to him, "It was Falconara who did it all!—it was he who successfully interceded with his Excellency the Minister!"

"It was impossible," said the Chief of the Police, now stepping forward to speak on his own account,—"it was impossible to offer any resistance against the prayers and intercessions of this worthy young minister of the Gospel, who loves your lordship as if he were your own son! Go, my lord—you are free! If you remain at Naples, let it be in some sanctuary to which the police dare not penetrate; and I beseech you to lose no time in taking measures to obtain the royal pardon. When reference is made to me on that point, I will give such an answer as shall induce the Minister of the Interior to recommend your lordship's cause to the favourable notice of the King."

"The British Embassy is a sanctuary," said

Charles De Vere, "into which no police-agents dare penetrate——"

"And my dwelling," interjected Father Falconara, "within the precincts of an ecclesiastical establishment, may likewise become a sanctuary if the Prefect will and ordain that it be so respected."

"I pledge my word to that effect," said the Minister.

"And I," said the Count of Camerino, "am now so crushed by the weight of calamity—I feel my spirit to be so completely broken—my energies to be so thoroughly undermined, that activity of life is henceforth for me impossible. I cannot sue at the King's feet for pardon: but on the other hand, I swear that henceforth I need not be looked upon as dangerous! In the sphere of politics I am dead: my heart is blighted within me! All that I now desire is permission to leave Naples for ever, and to retire to my Tuscan estates,—there to bury myself in the deep seclusion which can now be the only refuge for my bruised and wounded spirit."

"Leave Naples when you will, my lord," replied the Chief of the Police: "my pledge has gone forth——"

"But Ah!" said the Count, a dark shade suddenly coming over his features, and then giving place to the ghastliest expression which the imagination can well conceive: "what of him—that unhappy boy——"

"He is a parricide," interjected the Minister, emphatically: "or at least he is in purpose and intention, though not in fact!"

"My dear benefactor," whispered the young priest to the Count, "I did not intercede for Silvio: I dared not demand two lives! And even if I had thought that I possessed influence sufficient, I would not have exerted it on your son's behalf. No—I would not!"

"His name ought not to be spoken," said the Marquis of Ortona solemnly.

"Yet one word more!" said the Count of Camerino, turning towards the Prefect: and then with a great effort he asked, "Is my son Silvio to die?"

"He is to die," responded the Chief of the Police. "In a few days——"

"Ah! in a few days?" said the Count, again with a ghastly expression sweeping over his features. "I must remain in Naples for those few days! I must see him at the last moment! Yes—I must see him!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed the Minister of Police.

"If you obtain not the King's pardon you must not tarry in Naples: or if you do tarry in this city, it must be either at the British Embassy or within the sacred precincts of some ecclesiastical establishment. But how, in this case, can you see your son? I charge you, my lord, not to come hither again!"

"Leave it all to me," whispered Father Falconara, in the ear of the Count of Camerino: "I will devise a means to gratify the desire which in the magnanimous spirit of paternal forgiveness you have formed!"

The Count of Camerino now departed from the Prefecture, in company with the Marquis of Ortona, Charles De Vere, and Father Falconara; and it was at the residence of the young ecclesiastic that he sought a temporary asylum.

Three days afterwards the remains of the Countess of Camerino were consigned to the tomb. The funeral was conducted with the utmost privacy, and at a late hour in the evening: but when the bier was in the church, the Count of Camerino knelt by the side, and repeated the forgiveness which he had before proclaimed in respect to the guilty and perished Geneva!

A week afterwards there was a hasty trial of several political offenders; and amongst them was the Viscount Silvio di Camerino. Severe sentences were pronounced—for the reign of terror was then at its height in Naples, and from the tribunal to the scaffold the interval was short. Silvio was condemned to death!

Then a few more days elapsed; and at the expiration of this period the streets were one morning crowded all along a particular direction, for several victims of political vengeance were being conducted to the place of execution. A wretched procession of three heavy jolting carts, drawn by the surriest horses, was now wending its way through the streets, amidst that crowd of spectators. The first cart contained three victims—the second two—and the third only one. This solitary individual who enjoyed the aristocratic luxury of being left alone, as it were, in his misery, was the Viscount Silvio di Camerino. His face was of marble paleness, as if indeed he were already a corpse: but his eyes shone with the strong glaring light of mingled horror and despair.

The wretched procession continued its way,—preceded, attended, and followed by *sbirri*, while the multitudes maintained a profound silence. Presently the carts began to pass that particular church which has so often been alluded to in the course of this Neapolitan episode; and forth from the sacred edifice came three priests, whose duty it was to accompany the doomed men from that spot to the place of execution. The first priest ascended into the first cart—the second priest entered the next: but the third priest, standing by the side of the third cart, breathed a few words in the ear of the Viscount Silvio di Camerino.

Those words produced an instantaneous and powerful effect: the wretched young nobleman's countenance denoted the violent agitation which was excited within his breast; and he exclaimed, "I demand permission to be alone with this holy priest! I have something to confess!"

"That permission is accorded," said the officer commanding the escort of *sbirri*.

The procession was accordingly stopped. Silvio di Camerino descended from the cart; and in the custody of two of the police officials, he was conducted into the church, the crowd forming a lane from the cart itself up to the portal of that holy temple, and the priest leading the way. Need we inform the reader that this priest was Father Falconara?

On entering the church, the young priest said to the *sbirri*, "Remain here at the door; and suffer your prisoner to accompany me as far as the confessional. I pledge myself for his security."

The two *sbirri* at once acquiesced in this demand; and Silvio—quivering from head to foot—full of nervous agitation—accompanied Falconara towards the confessional. And now from behind a pillar, a tall form, enveloped in a cloak, slowly merged. Silvio's first impulse was to bound for-

ward and fly into the arms which he had been told would be open to receive him: but he was suddenly overwhelmed by a sense of all his stupendous criminality towards his father—and he sank down upon his knees, moaning and lamenting bitterly.

"Silvio," said the Count of Camerino, advancing towards the wretched youth, and speaking in a tone where anguish and awe-felt solemnity were strangely blended, "I promised that when death should be at hand either for one or for both of us, I would proclaim my forgiveness—and not till then! Alas, alas! that moment is come! My God! it is now present! Oh, fearful—horrible moment! I forgive thee, Silvio!—I forgive thee, my unhappy son!—yes, from the very bottom of my soul do I forgive thee!"

The unhappy father now threw himself upon the breast of the perhaps still more unhappy son; and a most affecting scene ensued. Again and again did Silvio beseech his sire's forgiveness!—again and again did the parent reiterate the assurance of fullest pardon! Father Falconara was so overcome by his emotions on beholding this spectacle, that he was compelled to lean against a pillar for support; and when he strove to pray, broken sentences only emanated from his lips. At length the Count of Camerino exclaimed, in accents which denoted the most excruciating mental anguish, "This scene can endure no longer! Farewell, my son! If thou art indeed penitent, we may meet again in heaven!"

Silvio threw himself upon his father's breast, sobbing, lamenting, and weeping bitterly. The young ecclesiastic, now regaining somewhat of his own self-possession, exhorted them both to arm themselves with Christian fortitude; and after one last, fervid, agonizing embrace, they parted.

Silvio, attended by Father Falconara, returned to the door of the church, where the two *sbirri* were waiting; and back to the cart he was conducted,—the crowd wondering what it was that he could have had to confess. And now it was with comparative resignation that Silvio went to the fatal spot; and while his life was being surrendered up, his unhappy father remained kneeling upon the steps of the altar in the church where the words of pardon had been spoken and where the last farewells had been said!

CHAPTER LL.

LUCREZIA AND CIPRINA.

WE have given some little description of the Marchioness di Mirano's palatial mansion in the city of Florence; and we may now inform the reader that her ladyship's villa, beautifully situated in the Vale of Arno, and at a distance of about half-a-dozen miles from the Tuscan capital itself, was as beautifully appointed as the town-dwelling. The furniture was less massive and sumptuous—it was lighter and more elegant: all the arrangements were on a smaller scale—and the villa seemed to be a retreat whence the more stately formality and ceremony which appeared proper and suitable for the town-mansion, might be banished. And might not that villa serve as the bower of love? Was it

not a retreat admirably adapted for an affair of gallantry? Even though it was now winter, yet were the walks in the garden bordered by ever-greens—the choicest flowers were in the conservatories—the most delicious fruits were in the hot-houses. There were pavilions and arbours warmed by artificial means; and the rooms in the interior of the dwelling were so cheerful in their aspect, so luxurious in their comforts, and so beautifully decorated with exotic flowers—the atmosphere likewise was so warm, and such a delicious perfume pervaded it—that the Mirano Villa seemed in all respects to constitute a little temple where beauty might hold sweetest companionship with pleasure, and where the soul might steep itself in the delights of an earthly paradise.

The Marchioness Lucrezia di Mirano was in every sense voluptuousness itself—but not that voluptuousness which is indeed naught but gross sensuality: it was a refined, a polished, and an elegant voluptuousness, elevating the sense so nearly to the sentiment that like rainbow-tints they might be said to blend imperceptibly. The reader has seen that Lucrezia confessed herself to have no pretension to virtue, while she had likewise declared that she had never known what love was. Still she bestowed not her favours thoughtlessly or indiscriminately: on the contrary, it was only where her tastes and fancy were entirely pleased that she would give way to the impulse. But if an overture were made to her by any one without some previous little sign of encouragement from herself, Lucrezia would repel the audacity with as much scorn and indignation as if it were the most immaculate virtue which had thus received an insult. She was fond of the pleasures of the table—but never ate nor drank to excess. It pleased her taste to behold a variety of the most exquisite dishes upon the board as well as an assortment of the rarest and costliest wines; and she would even linger long over the festal scene that she might extend the pleasure of beholding all that wealth and taste had there heaped together. But in this, as in all her other enjoyments, Lucrezia combined sentiment with the sense; and it was impossible to accuse her of unredeemed sensuality. She had the passion of a Messalina without her depravity—the beauty of a Lucrezia Borgia without having a conscience stained by a Borgia's crimes!

Such was the Marchioness of Mirano, between whom and the beautiful Ciprina circumstances had established an intimacy and friendship. Two or three weeks passed; and during this interval Ciprina read in the newspapers an account of the condemnation and death of Silvio di Camerino. For a few minutes she was shocked: she wished he had succeeded in making his escape on the memorable night when her own safety was assured; but she consoled herself for his loss by the recollection that there were still plenty of handsome young men in the world, and no small number indeed in the Tuscan capital.

Ciprina was now leading a life of refined and voluptuous enjoyment,—precisely such an existence as was best suited to her temperament and disposition. When she awoke in the morning, it was to gaze around a chamber most exquisitely furnished, and to be attended upon by two or three handmaidens of a beauty so interesting



to excite the admiration of even their own sex. From her couch Ciprina was conducted to a bath-room, where the atmosphere was deliciously perfumed, and the water of the bath itself had the fragrance of eau-de-cologne or otto of roses. Then, on issuing from the bath, Ciprina's luxuriant raven hair was gently and softly combed out by the handmaidens; and if it suited the young lady's mood to have music, she had but to speak the word and the wish was complied with. Her toilet was performed with the least possible amount of exertion to herself; and as her time was entirely her own, she might linger over it with a species of delicious languor or pleasurable indolence. Then, on joining the Marchioness in the breakfast parlour, Ciprina was sure to find her noble friend provided with some amusing topic of discourse; while the repast itself was such as to tempt the most fastidious appetite, or create one where it naturally existed not. Then the forenoon was spent

in lounging over portfolios of prints—in the music-room—or in the picture gallery—or perhaps by a visit to the conservatories: but never did Ciprina put her hand to needlework,—no, not even to such light embroidery as the most fashionable idleness or aristocratic indolence might choose as the means of whiling away an hour or two. In the afternoon visitors were received—for the Marchioness was acquainted with all the *élite* of Florentine society; or else, if the ladies did not choose to remain indoors, the carriage was ordered and they resorted to the public exhibitions, to day-concerts, or to *conversazioni*, or to any others of the numerous fashionable amusements with which the Tuscan capital abounds. In the evening the Marchioness generally invited a few friends to dinner; and three or four times a week her saloons were thrown open at nine o'clock for the reception of those who had the *entré* at her mansion.

We have thus hastily sketched an outline of the mode of life now led by the beautiful Ciprina. We are now about to direct the attention of the reader to a particular evening when there was a more than usually large assemblage of guests at Lucrezia Mirano's town-mansion. A month had elapsed since Ciprina had been an inmate of that palatial residence: and it was now therefore verging towards the close of January, in the year 1849. The weather was cold without—but the atmosphere was warm within those splendidly furnished apartments. The magnificent chandeliers poured a flood of lustre throughout the saloons: the brilliancy of that light was enhanced by its reflection in the vast mirrors; and the elegantly apparelled guests moved through that blaze of lustre like gorgeous insects in the glorious glare of the sun-light. On this particular evening the Marchioness and Ciprina were for the first time introduced to a young French gentleman bearing the name of Edgar Marcellin. He had recently arrived at Florence: he was reputed to be rich; and he had brought with him letters of introduction which procured him immediate admission into the best circles of Florentine society. He had borne the title of Count previous to the Revolution of 1848: but by that grand political convulsion in his native country all aristocratic distinctions were destroyed,—and at the time of which we are writing they had not been restored under the *regime* of the usurper Louis Napoleon. Thus Count de Marcellin was now plain M. Marcellin: but he was not the less cordially welcomed in fashionable society at Florence. He was one of those elegant Parisians who might be put forward as a living argument to support the assertion that the French are the politest and most refined people on the face of the earth. His manners were perfect in their polished elegance—but yet without fastidiousness or coyness: on the contrary, there was a manly ease in his bearing which placed him on good terms with any strangers to whom he might choose to make himself agreeable. He was well educated and intelligent; and with the most perfect tact he could vary his conversation over the whole range of fashionable frivolities, and thence throughout the sphere of poetry, the drama, literature generally, the fine arts, and even science, just as he saw would at the time prove suitable to the tastes and intellects of his auditors. All these advantages of manners and mind were accompanied by an equal amount of personal ones. It would be difficult to conceive a more perfect specimen of masculine beauty than this French gentleman. He was between twenty-four and twenty-five years of age—of the middle height, and with a figure faultlessly symmetrical. He had regular Grecian features—black hair, curling naturally—a beard that in the punctilious nicety of its trimming formed a finishing frame to set off the oval of his countenance—and a glossy moustache giving effect to the brilliancy of his teeth. He dressed with a simplicity that was in itself the very perfection of gentility: he wore but very little jewellery—yet the single diamond which sent forth its vivid jets of light from the ring upon his finger, was more costly than all the accumulated masses of trinkets with which many another young “fashionable” had bedizened his person. But everything about

Edgar Marcellin bespoke a refined taste, a gentlemanly feeling, and the tact of the man of the world.

No sooner had Edgar Marcellin arrived in Florence, than all the aristocratic saloons rang with praises of the brilliant Frenchman; so that there was a species of scramble, if we may use the term, as to who should be fortunate enough in first obtaining his presence as a guest at their entertainments. The Marchioness di Mirano had expressed to a gentleman-friend her desire that M. Marcellin should be introduced to her: the gentleman-friend accomplished the task; and hence the appearance of the polished Frenchman at the Mirano mansion on the evening of which we are speaking. It was a *concozzazione*: there was but little dancing—music, discourse, the inspection of new prints and pictures, and such-like recreations were whiling away the time until the supper room should be thrown open. At the moment when M. Marcellin was announced, Ciprina was seated on a low ottoman, in the midst of a group who were examining a small picture by some celebrated master, and which a *connoisseur* having that day picked up at a great price, had brought to display in pursuance of a custom common enough at *concozzazioni* in Italian society. Ciprina was elegantly dressed; and she looked most ravishingly beautiful. She affected to be perfectly indifferent to the arrival of the brilliant Frenchman who was being made the “lion” of society in the Tuscan capital; and she pretended to keep her eyes riveted on the *connoisseur's* picture, while all others present were now glancing towards him whose name had just been proclaimed from the lips of the lacquey at the gilded portals of the saloon. But Ciprina *did* nevertheless fling one furtive look in that direction; and then turning towards a lady who was near, she said, as if thinking only of the picture, “Well, I do not pretend to be a judge—but I certainly think it is well worth the price which the present owner has paid for it.”

“My dear Signora,” whispered the lady, in astonishment; “is it possible that you can be thinking of this comparatively trumpery picture, when the brilliant Edgar Marcellin has just been announced?”

“Oh, indeed!” said Ciprina, as if with a languid air of the most perfect indifference: and then she went on making some additional remarks in reference to the picture.

Meanwhile Edgar Marcellin, having been welcomed by the Marchioness di Mirano, was now slowly making his way through the apartment, by her ladyship's aide; and while bowing to those persons with whom he was already acquainted, he threw out a variety of complimentary remarks, couched in the most delicate terms, in reference to the splendour of her ladyship's rooms, the taste which had prevailed over their appointments, and the distinguished company which she had collected on the occasion. Marcellin's quick eye showed him (though he affected to perceive it not) that his appearance had produced an immense sensation, and that he was the observed of all observers. No—not quite! There was one exception. That lady, seated upon the ottoman, and who appeared to be intent on the survey of a picture which rested against the back of a chair!—who could she be, that she was thus utterly indifferent to the

presence of the brilliant Frenchman? It was some such question which Marcellin actually asked of himself; and then he was struck by the flowing outlines and softly rounded symmetry of the figure upon that ottoman. Who was she? His eyes were turned inquiringly upon the Marchioness, who, smiling, said, "Oh, I am about to present you to that young lady. She is a very dear friend of mine—she lives with me altogether."

"I shall indeed be proud to form the acquaintance of—"

And Marcellin stopped short, as if pausing for the name to be mentioned.

"The Signora Ciprina," said the Marchioness.

"Surely that must be the name of Venus herself, in your Italian tongue?"—and Edgar Marcellin again turned his eyes, as he spoke, upon the beautiful shape seated on the ottoman.

"Ciprina," said the Marchioness, "allow me to introduce you to M. Marcellin. I must leave you to form each other's acquaintance; for the arrival of other distinguished guests claims my attention elsewhere."

Though a thorough man of the world, and therefore perfectly master of himself upon nearly all occasions, yet the young Frenchman could not help starting for an instant with surprise at the exceedingly handsome countenance of Ciprina as raised up towards his own, when the introduction took place. Edgar bowed with a respect more profound than in the natural ease of his manner he was wont to display; while Ciprina inclined her head, not exactly with coldness, but with a kind of gracious condescension, as if she were perfectly indifferent to the fact that this was the brilliant Frenchman, and as if she were merely treating him with the ordinary ladylike courtesy that she would have shown towards any other individual. Edgar was piqued: but he was too much a man of the world to show it. He at once glided into conversation with Ciprina: but he managed to infuse, so to speak, a certain glacial reserve into the politeness of his mien and tone. It was as much as to give her to understand that if she looked upon him as an ordinary individual, he on his own side regarded her as being in no way superior to the other ladies present. Having conversed with her for some few minutes, Marcellin bowed slightly, and strolled away with an easy air towards another part of the room. The Marchioness soon accosted him, and said, "What think you of my young friend Ciprina? Is she not very handsome?"

"Handsome?" said Marcellin, as if vaguely and dubiously. "Well, I really did not notice," he added, with an air of ingenuousness so perfect that the Marchioness was deceived by it.

"What!" she cried, looking astonished; "you failed to observe that Ciprina is exceedingly beautiful? And yet, M. Marcellin, I have been assured that you are a person of exquisite taste!"

"Ah!" said Edgar, for a moment throwing a certain degree of significance into his looks: "remember that I had seen your ladyship before I saw the Signora Ciprina, and my mind being filled with the one image, afforded no room for any special impression to be made by the other."

The Marchioness smiled at the compliment, and moved away. She presently sought an oppor-

tunity of speaking to Ciprina, to whom she said, "What think you, my dear friend, of Edgar Marcellin?"

"He is very well for a Frenchman," replied the young lady, with a seemingly listless air.

"Very well for a Frenchman?" ejaculated Lucrezia di Mirano. "Why, do you not know that the French are the most polished and refined nation on the face of the earth?"

"Ah, true! I forgot it," rejoined Ciprina, "when conversing with M. Marcellin;"—and it was with an air of the utmost indifference that she thus spoke.

The Marchioness was more and more astonished as she thought to herself that the two handsomest persons in the room appeared to be thus completely apathetic and callous in reference to each other.

"It was my intention and object," thought Lucrezia within herself, "to allow Ciprina the opportunity of making a conquest in this quarter. But as she is so indifferent, methinks that I myself—"

And with the half-expressed yet significant idea in her head, Lucrezia di Mirano traversed the room in order to throw herself into the way of the handsome young Frenchman. Edgar Marcellin was speedily by her side; they sat down together upon a sofa, apart from the guests generally; and Lucrezia soon found that rumour had in no way deceived her in respect to the intellectual accomplishments of Edgar Marcellin. The evening passed away—the company departed—and as Lucrezia di Mirano retired to her own chamber, she thought to herself that the conquest of the young Frenchman was already assured. Ciprina also thought of Edgar Marcellin—but in what particular strain we are not at present enabled to inform the reader.

A fortnight passed from the date of that brilliant entertainment; and Edgar Marcellin called almost daily at the mansion. It usually happened that the Marchioness and Ciprina were both together in the drawing-room when the young Frenchman was announced: and when this was the case, his attentions were decidedly not more marked towards one than towards the other. His manner had the ease and frankness of a gentleman lounging away some idle time at a house where he knew he was welcome; and it likewise exhibited the increasing friendliness which naturally arose from the frequent repetition of the visits, and which soon began to approximate what may be termed intimacy. Sometimes however Ciprina happened to be absent when Edgar Marcellin called; and then the Marchioness gradually began to give him to understand, as far as at the outset she chose to go, that he was by no means an object of indifference to her: and Edgar accordingly threw tender looks upon the beautiful Florentine lady. Yet though it thus happened that the Marchioness and Edgar sometimes found themselves alone together, it never occurred that the Marchioness herself was absent and that he and Ciprina met *tête à tête*. Lucrezia Mirano always took care to be present at the hour when the young Frenchman's visits might be expected.

One day Ciprina happened to be passing through the picture-gallery on her way to the library, where she wished to procure some particular French or English books, of which there was a

large assortment,—when she beheld the handsome young page Giulio turn abruptly away into a window-recess; and there he stood with his back towards Ciprina as she passed. Indeed it was evident that he affected to be looking down into the garden, and not to perceive her presence there at all; so that it at once struck her he must be concealing some strong emotion. Her first impulse was to pass on without appearing to notice the young page: but a sentiment of curiosity induced her to retrace her way; and accosting him, she said, “Do you happen to know whether the door of the library is unlocked?”

“Yes, Signora—I believe so,” replied Giulio, but without altering his position at the casement or turning his countenance towards Ciprina.

She now felt convinced that some strong emotion was agitating the young page: her curiosity was still more piqued than at first; and determined, if possible, to gratify it, she sought an excuse for continuing the conversation.

“What is it that attracts your attention in the garden, Giulio?” she inquired.

“Nothing, Signora—nothing,” he responded somewhat petulantly: “only—I mean that I love to—to look out upon the evergreens——”

“And perhaps you are fond of pictures, Giulio?” said Ciprina; “as I find you lounging in this gallery where there are certainly some beautiful specimens of the painter’s art—and none more remarkable than the portrait exactly opposite.”

Giulio started, and flung upon Ciprina a look which was evidently meant to ascertain whether she had an object in making that observation, or whether it had been merely thrown out at random. She now saw that he had been weeping; and he, struck by the thought that he was betraying his emotion, quickly averted his countenance again.

“You are unhappy, Giulio?” said Ciprina: “and though perhaps it is scarcely seemly for me to question you on such a point——”

“Oh, unhappy?” he exclaimed, in a sudden paroxysm of excitement. “Yes—I am unhappy! But not to you, Signora, dare I reveal the cause!—nor if I did, ought I to expect words of sympathy from your lips. No!—but the laugh of ridicule, or contempt and scorn——”

“Giulio, I am incapable of ridiculing the sorrows of a fellow-creature,” answered Ciprina. “Therefore, again I say that if it be not unseemly for me to question you—and if you think fit——”

At this moment it struck both Ciprina and Giulio that the door at the further extremity of the gallery opened for an instant and then closed again, gently though suddenly. Ciprina stepped short, while she and the youth exchanged rapid glances of inquiry.

“Methought the door opened,” said Ciprina, “and that it was instantaneously closed again——”

“The same idea struck me, Signora,” answered the page: “but yet it could scarcely have been so——”

“No—it could scarcely have been so,” said Ciprina: “for no one could have hesitated to enter because——”

She stopped short, and did not give audible expression to the finish of the sentence. What she meant to say was to the effect that no one would retreat from that door on account of her and Giulio being there together. But her pride had checked

her ere she had given utterance to words which might almost have been looked upon as savouring of the significance of an overture, or at all events of being invested with a certain degree of importance.

“It must have been mere fancy, Signora,” said the young page: and with a respectful bow he moved away from the window-recess, bending his steps in the direction of the door which he and Ciprina had for a moment imagined to have been opened and shut at the further extremity of the gallery.

The young lady could not now seek to detain him; and she therefore passed on in the opposite direction, towards the library. Her curiosity was still piqued in reference to the handsome young page: and she almost resolved to seek another opportunity of questioning him. The allusion to the portrait had evidently touched a chord which vibrated in his heart: she knew the intimacy which had subsisted between himself and the Marchioness—she had seen no alteration of conduct on the part of Lucrezia towards him—and she wondered therefore why the youth should be so unhappy.

On the following morning, when the Marchioness and Ciprina were seated at the breakfast-table, the former said, “It is a delicious day, my friend, for the season of the year: and I have conceived a fancy to take a trip to the villa. Will you accompany me? We will pass a day or two there—or as long a period as you like——”

“I shall be most happy to accompany you, my dear Lucrezia,” answered Ciprina; “and as for the length of our sojourn at your charming seat in the Vale of Arno, it shall depend entirely upon your own will and pleasure.”

The carriage was ordered to be in readiness at about noon; and Ciprina presently withdrew to her chamber to perform her toilet for the journey. When, at mid-day, she descended the marble staircase in company with the Marchioness to enter the carriage, she perceived that Giulio was to accompany them, for he was standing at the door of the equipage. He had a pensive melancholy look—though in other respects his features were entirely composed; and Ciprina observed that instead of flinging upon the Marchioness a furtive look of love and admiration as he had often before been wont to do, his eyes were bent downward as she lightly placed her hand upon his arm while she ascended into the vehicle. Ciprina followed—the door was closed—Giulio leapt up into the rumble behind; and away went the splendid equipage through the streets of Florence.

The villa was reached; and the Marchioness said to Ciprina, “I hope, my dear friend, that you will not be dull, or find the time hang heavy upon your hands here to-day; for it is not probable that we shall receive any visits until the morrow—I have invited no company to meet us at dinner——”

“My dear Lucrezia,” exclaimed Ciprina, “can I not be happy with you? and does not this beautiful place possess all the charms and attractions requisite to make a sojourn here most agreeable?”

“I trust that you will find it so,” rejoined the Marchioness. “Come! let us walk through the apartments: for since you were last here, various objects of interest have been added,—statues,

vases, pictures—indeed, you remember I told you the other day that I had commissioned a *connoisseur* to attend a sale for me, with *carte blanche* to make what purchases he thought fit; and the results are now here.”

The new purchases were accordingly inspected; and Ciprina was much interested in the objects which she thus beheld. But she was completely astonished on being conducted to the suite of chambers specially appropriated to the use of the Marchioness herself. This suite consisted of an elegant boudoir, a bath-room, and a bedchamber. Ciprina had seen them before: she was then pleased with the luxury and taste of all the appointments; but now she was astonished as well as interested, for all those appointments had been changed—the boudoir and the bedchamber had been completely re-furnished, in a style of mingled elegance and sumptuousness which utterly defies description.

“This is truly beautiful!” exclaimed Ciprina: “the draperies are the handsomest I ever beheld! These ornaments—these embellishments—all these exquisite panel-paintings—that elaborate gilding—those mouldings—”

“Well, I am glad that you are pleased with the apartments,” said the Marchioness; “and it will be a source of delight to me if you will consider this suite of rooms to be your own?”

“What! and deprive you of the apartments you have thus elegantly fitted up for your own use?”

“The villa has other suites of apartments,” rejoined the Marchioness, with a smile; “and if these be to your taste, perhaps I shall find others equally well adapted to my own liking. At all events, my dear Ciprina, I expect that you will consider this suite as your own; and therefore let us say not another syllable on the subject. The weather is magnificent—we will go forth and breathe the fresh air of the pleasure-grounds.”

The two ladies walked in the garden; and they whiled away the time until the dinner-hour. They dined alone together: music and conversation made the evening pass rapidly; and as the Marchioness complained of fatigue, they retired at about ten o'clock.

Ciprina proceeded to the exquisitely appointed suite of apartments which she had so much admired, and which the Marchioness had abandoned to her use. Two lady's-maids assisted at her night-toilet; and they retired when Ciprina was in readiness to seek her couch. But when the maidens were gone, Ciprina did not at once enter that couch: she experienced not the slightest inclination for slumber—she had only sought her chamber thus unusually early because the Marchioness herself, complaining of fatigue, had shown an inclination to retire betimes to her own room. Ciprina was delighted with the exquisite appointments in the suite where she found herself: whichever way she turned there was something fresh to admire. The wax-lights which were burning in her chamber, revealed new objects of interest in every direction where her eyes fell. Thus, with merely a loose wrapper thrown around her form—with her raven hair floating over her shoulders and bosom—and with her naked feet thrust into slippers, Ciprina wandered about the chamber, inspecting all its features of adornment and embellishment. She might have been thus

occupied about a quarter of an hour, when to her surprise she suddenly heard an equipage drive rapidly out of the premises; and on speeding to the window, she discerned by the aid of the clear moonlight the travelling-carriage of the Marchioness. Ciprina could not understand what this might mean: she turned away in bewilderment from the casement—but it was only to be startled by a fresh incident that occurred; for a door, the existence of which was hitherto unsuspected by her, opened in the panelled wall, and the young page Giulio made his appearance!

An ejaculation of mingled anger and surprise burst from the lips of Ciprina: but it was an expression of the most unmixed amazement which fell from those of Giulio.

CHAPTER LII.

GIULIO AND EDGAR.

CIPRINA's anger was for a moment excited by the idea that the young page had of his own accord audaciously sought that chamber, knowing that she herself was there: but when she perceived how immense was his amazement, she felt convinced that his presence was the result of an error. Hastily drawing the wrapper more closely around her form, she said, with a half smile and with a slight blush upon her countenance, “It is not I whom you expected to meet here, Giulio?”

But instead of making any answer—instead of even showing the slightest inclination to quit the chamber—the young page stood as if riveted upon the threshold of the door which had given him admittance, and which communicated with a private staircase the existence of which had been utterly unknown to Ciprina. Yes—there stood the youth, transfixed with amazement, gazing upon Ciprina as if unable to believe the evidence of his own eyes:—and then an expression of dark sinister rage swept over his features.

“By heaven,” he muttered, “this is too much! It must have been done purposely! But tell me, Signora—how came you here? why did you not depart in the carriage? Surely, surely all this has not been done with your consent?”

“I do not understand you, Giulio,” interjected Ciprina, for a moment inclined to be angry at the thought that she should become an accomplice in any plot to bring about an intrigue between herself and a menial: but her curiosity was too much excited to allow her to put an abrupt end to the scene without first obtaining some explanations.

“Signora,” he said, “pray answer me!”

“You have spoken to me in *agnosmas*, Giulio,” she rejoined: “you have addressed to me queries the purport of which I cannot understand. Come!—under existing circumstances there must be no fastidiousness! Shut that door, and explain to me why you are here.”

Giulio now seemed absorbed in dark and agitating thoughts; for this much his countenance denoted. He did not move from the threshold of that secret door: he even appeared to be unconscious of Ciprina's presence,—until suddenly raising his looks, he demanded sternly, “Signora, how came you here?”

"Giulio," responded Ciprina, "you seem to forget the difference which subsists between us. You speak to me with an imperiousness which would elicit the most indignant rebuke from my lips were it not that I feel that existing circumstances are as peculiar as they are embarrassing, and that therefore we must give explanations. For my part I have nothing more to say than this,—that on arriving here in the afternoon, the Marchioness indicated this suite of apartments to be henceforth my own, whenever I might sojourn at the villa."

"Ah!"—and now the young page appeared to begin to have some clue to the reading of a mystery which had perplexed him; but the light of intelligence which shone in his eyes, was sinister and peculiar.

"And you were ignorant, Signora," he said, "of the intended departure of her ladyship this night?"

"Utterly ignorant," replied Ciprina. "I heard the sounds of the equipage suddenly leaving the premises—I looked from the window—I saw that it was the travelling-carriage which brought us hither in the middle of the day—I was still overwhelmed with astonishment, when this secret door opened——"

"Ah! then it was indeed a secret door so far as you, Signora, were concerned?" exclaimed Giulio: "and you expected not that your privacy would be intruded upon?"

"A surely not!" answered Ciprina.

"Forgive me, lady, therefore, for this intrusion!" said Giulio, with a low respectful bow: and stepping back over the threshold, he vanished from Ciprina's view, the door closing in a moment.

Ciprina was almost as much astonished at this last proceeding as she was at the abrupt appearance of the page in the first instance. She had expected explanations: but he vanished, leaving her curiosity ungratified. She was half inclined to open the secret door, if possible, and call after him: but she scarcely liked to take this step, for the idea was growing up in her mind that the Marchioness had been purposely manoeuvring to throw Giulio and herself together. Ciprina sought her couch, wondering what explanations the morrow would elicit;—and sleep gradually stole upon her eyes.

When the maids entered Ciprina's chamber in the morning, one of them said, "You must not be surprised nor annoyed, Signora, if you find yourself alone at the breakfast-table presently; for the Marchioness was summoned back to Florence last night——"

"Indeed?" ejaculated Ciprina. "I heard an equipage depart between eleven and twelve o'clock——"

"It was her ladyship's travelling carriage. It appears, Signora," continued the maid, "that shortly after you retired to your chamber last evening, a messenger arrived with a letter for the Marchioness—I believe it was to announce the sudden and very serious illness of some particular lady-friend—so that the equipage was ordered—her ladyship would not allow you to be disturbed—and she set off with the least possible delay."

"And I presume the Marchioness will return in the course of the day?" said Ciprina.

"Most probably, Signora," rejoined the maid. "At all events, if you wish to return to Florence before her ladyship comes back to the villa, there are equipages here——"

"No, I am not in any hurry to return to Florence," interrupted Ciprina. "Let breakfast be served up in my boudoir. But Ah! when I bethink me, it will be only kind on my part if I send off a note to the Marchioness, condoling with her on the illness of her friend, and offering my services if in any way they can be rendered available. Therefore bid Giulio come to me presently: I will despatch him to Florence——"

"Giulio is not here, Signora," was the reply: "he set off at an early hour on horseback for Florence: but any other one of the male domestics will perform your errand."

"Well, we shall see presently," said Ciprina: and her morning toilet being now complete, she passed into her boudoir.

She was annoyed to find that Giulio was not at the villa. She had really no intention of despatching any note to the Marchioness, for she felt assured that the tale of the lady-friend's sudden illness was only a pretext or an excuse for her own abrupt departure:—but Ciprina wanted to see Giulio that she might elicit from his lips something more in the way of explanation than on the preceding evening she had obtained.

Ciprina was giving way to her reflections. The morning repast was terminated—she was half reclining upon a sofa, with her usual air of indolence. By her beauty she indeed seemed well fitted to occupy that exquisitely furnished apartment, where the atmosphere was warm and perfumed, and where love might from surrounding objects find impulses or suggestions for the pleading of its suit. For the pictures suspended to the walls depicted scenes from the heathen mythology relative to the amours of gods and goddesses; while the alabaster statuettes represented kindred subjects. There was no indelicacy either in the paintings on the canvas or in the statuary groups: but still the effect was that of a refined sensuousness and exquisitely sublimated voluptuousness which could not fail to produce a particular impression under certain circumstances.

Ciprina was reclining upon the sofa, giving way to her reflections, when the door of the boudoir gently opened, and one of the maids gliding in, introduced a gentleman. She immediately retired: an exclamation of mingled surprise and joy burst from the lips of Edgar Marcellin—for he the gentleman was; and hastening forward, he threw himself at the lady's feet, exclaiming, "Thanks—a thousand thanks, beautiful Ciprina! for this unexpected pleasure! For, O! though the pretext was gratifying to my vanity, yet this reality, as I now find it, is most in accordance with my heart's desire!"

This language was utterly enigmatical to Ciprina: she could not for the life of her comprehend it: but it was evident that she felt not offended with the handsome young Frenchman for the step he had taken. Pleasure, and satisfaction, and triumph shone luminously in her eyes, as she gave him her hand, which he pressed to his lips.

"Ah, Ciprina! dearest Ciprina!" he exclaimed; "then it is as I have been informed, and you have all along loved me?"

"I have loved you, Edgar," she replied, raising him up from his suppliant posture, and suffering him to take a seat upon the sofa. "Yes, from the very instant that we first met——"

"And I too felt my heart smitten with love for yourself," said Marcellin, again pressing her beautiful hand to his lips. "But why that coldness and reserve on the evening when we first met?"

"Because," responded Ciprina, "all the ladies around seemed to feel that you came as the conqueror of all hearts—that you were a victor against whom it was utterly useless to struggle—and that therefore the only alternative was to kneel and submit at once. But I, Edgar, had my pride: I pretended to be indifferent—I treated you as if you were a mere ordinary person—yet in my heart I had the presentiment that the time would come when we should be different towards each other;—and then, on the morrow, that presentiment—that idea—that hope I may almost term it—was destroyed!"

"Destroyed?" echoed Edgar. "And why so?"

"Because—because," said Ciprina, hesitatingly, "I saw that the Marchioness di Mirano had been struck by you—and as I had appeared in the very first instance to be utterly indifferent with regard to you, and had even in my silly pride expressed as much to the Marchioness, I felt that it was only then fair to leave the stage entirely open for herself, and to resign whatsoever aspiration I might secretly have formed. But you, Edgar—why on your side were you likewise glacial and distant?"

"When I entered the brilliant saloon that evening," responded Marcellin, "I perceived a sensation and an interest all around,—one lady only seeming to be apathetic and indifferent. That lady was yourself. We were introduced: I treated you as you treated me. I bore myself towards you with a cold politeness,—but yet a politeness which I strove to render most perfect and unexceptionable in all its details, so that there should be nothing savouring of vindictiveness or insult. And even while we were thus demeaning ourselves towards each other, I could not help thinking that there was in your heart a secret yearning towards me, as I felt that there was on my part towards you. It seemed to me as if we were two superior beings, infinitely above the common range of those around us, and that therefore we were disputing as it were the arena, neither choosing to surrender to the other at the first encounter. But afterwards, when I called at the mansion—and when I found that you continued precisely the same towards me, your manner being that of a mere lady-like courtesy,—I began to fancy that for the first time in my life I was mistaken—that I had in reality made no impression upon your heart—or that it might be otherwise engaged. Then perceiving an inclination on the part of the Marchioness di Mirano to initiate a little affair of gallantry—and you must confess, lovely Ciprina, that next to yourself your friend Lucrezia is the most beautiful woman in Florence——"

"I have not sufficient vanity to admit the truth of such a compliment," exclaimed Ciprina, smiling. "Lucrezia di Mirano is assuredly the most beautiful woman without any exception in all Florence!"

"Yes—at this moment," interjected Edgar tenderly; "because the lovely Ciprina is not in Florence, but is here at this charming villa in the Vale of Arno! Oh, is not this love's own chosen retreat? and ought not I to esteem myself blessed in being permitted to penetrate into this sanctuary?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Ciprina, "you have yet to tell me what circumstance sent or brought you hither?—and at the same time you must explain what you just now meant by the observation that though some pretext was gratifying to your vanity, yet that the reality, as you now found it, was most in accordance with your heart's desire. And then too you said that you had been informed that I had all along loved you. Pray who on earth could have been this informant?"

"The explanation can be given in a very few words," replied Edgar Marcellin. "That handsome young page——"

"Ah! Giulio?" said Ciprina, not altogether surprised to find that he was in some way mixed up in the affair.

"Yes—the handsome page Giulio," proceeded Edgar, "came to me just now, at the hotel where I am residing in Florence. He bade me take horse without delay, and proceed to this villa. Here I was to inquire for a maid bearing the name of Lisetta; and of Lisetta I was to demand that she would conduct me into the presence of her mistress, by whom Giulio assured me I had all along been sincerely loved. Methought he alluded to the Marchioness di Mirano; and therefore did I inform you, beautiful Ciprina, at the outset that the pretext would have gratified my heart's vanity, whereas the reality which I now enjoy is the gratification of my heart's desire."

"Still I do not comprehend you," said Ciprina; "or rather methinks that you yourself must be labouring under a misapprehension. You believe that——"

"Oh, play not the part of a prude with me, dearest Ciprina!" exclaimed Edgar Marcellin. "Confess that it was you who sent the young page to me,—that not knowing how I might be disposed towards yourself, you nevertheless felt assured that I should come if invoked in the name of the Marchioness—that you therefore bade Giulio so deliver his message as to leave in my mind the impression that it was Lucrezia herself summoning me hither! Yes, Ciprina! it was thus that you acted! But you judiciously and kindly suffered it to be announced unto me that she whom I was to meet here had loved me all along!"

Ciprina did not think it worth while to enter into explanations with Edgar Marcellin on the points to which he had been referring. She loved him—that is to say, as much as her sensuously-formed heart could experience the passion of love: he was with her—they had been brought together—and little indeed did it now matter by what circumstances this meeting had been accomplished. Ciprina therefore suffered Edgar Marcellin to remain under the impressions which it was not worth while to remove; and as she had full license from the Marchioness to use the villa as her own, and in all respects to act as if she were as much mistress there as her ladyship's self, she invited Edgar to pass the remainder of the day with her. Yet there was still one little circumstance which

troubled her; and this was, that the Marchioness might be offended on learning of this successful though unpremeditated rivalry on Ciprina's part. Yet as Ciprina felt almost convinced that Lucrezia had intended to throw her into the arms of the page Giulio, she looked upon the present occurrence as a commensurate little piece of revenge for that still inexplicable trick. Nevertheless, it must be observed that Ciprina would have been very loath to provoke an actual quarrel with the Marchioness, or seem to be ungrateful for the kindness she had received at her hands.

We must now return to Lucrezia's town-mansion in Florence. The reader has seen how abruptly she quitted the villa between eleven and twelve o'clock at night; and she was speedily borne to her palatial residence in the city. There she passed the remainder of that night: for the story of the illness of the lady-friend was but a pretext, as we have previously hinted. On the following morning Lucrezia di Mirano was seated at the breakfast-table at about ten o'clock, when the door opened and the young page Giulio entered the room, bearing a crystal dish of bothouse fruits, which he placed upon the board with an air as if nothing unusual had taken place—although perhaps a close observer and one who knew him well might have fathomed the uneasiness and restlessness which agitated as an under-current beneath the calm unruffled surface. The Marchioness gave an involuntary start as she beheld him: but instantaneously recovering her own composure and self-possession, she said, "I thought you were at the villa, Giulio?"

"Your ladyship left me at the villa last night," answered the youth, coldly and sadly: "but I left it at an early hour this morning. I thought that wherever the Marchioness di Mirano might be, there was the place of my duties!"

"And I thought, Giulio," said Lucrezia severely, "that it was the duty of a servant to obey orders. I took you to the villa—and there you should have remained until I bade you return hither or go elsewhere."

"I see, lady, that the moment for explanations has come," said Giulio, speaking firmly and even with dignity, but entirely without insolence or intimidation; so that there was nothing of the impertinent menial nor of the cowardly bully in his demeanour. "Yes—you left me at the villa; and your ladyship not merely gave me to understand that the Signora Ciprina was about to leave in the carriage for Florence, but likewise you bade me avail myself at a given hour of the secret staircase and the private door; and I was happy—yes, happy once again, for methought that the poor page Giulio might not after all have been the mere toy——"

"Enough of this insipid sentimentalism!" ejaculated the Marchioness, almost fiercely. "If you had properly finished your tale, you would have stated that on ascending into the boudoir you found yourself clasped in the arms of one whose beauty had fired your soul, and who on her own side longed for an opportunity——"

"Good heavens, my lady! what mean you?" ejaculated the young page, with the most unfeigned astonishment. "I found myself not clasped in the lady's arms—she was indignant and surprised—I was filled with wonderment——"

"And then," interrupted Lucrezia, with bitter irony, "all these strong feelings—surprise, indignation, and wonderment—were melted and absorbed in the passion so voluptuous and tender——"

"Lady, it was not so!" ejaculated the page, his handsome countenance flushing a vivid scarlet. "The Signora Ciprina treated me only as a menial——"

"False youth!" ejaculated Lucrezia angrily: "why do you thus persist in a ridiculous attempt to deceive me? Nay, interrupt me not! I command you to be silent, and hear me! I have been kind to you: but as for loving you, how often and often have I told you when you have been pining and whining at my feet, that the power of love existed not within me? You knew therefore that to me you were nothing more than the object of a passing fantasy, to be sooner or later discarded as a man discards his mistress. Well then, I was rejoiced when I saw that having triumphed over the insane and hopeless passion which you had been cherishing for me, you had become sensible to the superb beauties of Ciprina; and I was resolved to afford you both the opportunity which I knew you desired. But this aim I sought to accomplish with a delicacy that should be understood, and which would afford no scope for subsequent discourse or comment. I gave Ciprina my own suite of apartments; and I left the villa in order that she might remain the mistress there. I did not choose, when I told you that it was Ciprina who was going to return last night to Florence, and when I bade you ascend unto the chamber at a given hour—I did not choose, I say, to look you in the face and let you know that I, your mistress, was thus in reality pandering to your pleasures. And now you have the indelicacy and the audacity to speak on these subjects——"

"My lady, you are mistaken!" exclaimed the youth, his whole form writhing with agony at the thought of being so much misunderstood. "I swear to you that the Signora Ciprina's beauty has never upon me produced the slightest effect! Equally confident am I that towards the Signora Ciprina herself I am an object of corresponding indifference——"

"Tis false, Giulio!" exclaimed the Marchioness, now starting up from her seat and stamping her foot with rage and impatience. "I saw you in the picture-gallery together! It was the day before yesterday! You were in the window recess—you were speaking in low and earnest tones—or rather Ciprina was, and you were listening, doubtless with rapture, to the words of love and passion——"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Giulio, dismayed at the stupendous error into which the Marchioness had fallen concerning him.

"Ah! you plead guilty?" continued Lucrezia di Mirano; "you find yourself beaten out of the trenches of falsehood—and you confess yourself vanquished? Believe me, Giulio, I was not espying your actions—for until that instant I had no suspicion: but I was about to enter the picture-gallery, and as I opened the door, there I beheld you both! I at once comprehended everything and I withdrew. It answered not my purpose to break in upon your loving *tête-à-tête*; and you never would have known that I had seen you



there in that gallery if you had not by your present deceitful, false, and incomprehensible conduct——”

“By all the holy saints, I adjure you to hear me!” exclaimed the young page, who was evidently suffering an intolerable anguish while labouring under the imputations levelled against him by the Marchioness, but in the justice of which she herself most sincerely believed. “Yes—hear me, I beseech!—hear me to the end—and then judge me! I have loved you—I love you still: language has no power to describe this love of mine for you, lady! Well then, was it not natural that I should be sad and that the iron of affliction should enter into my soul, when I perceived that your favour was being averted from me and that it was turning towards the elegant young Frenchman——”

“Giulio!” interrupted the Marchioness, “if it were not for all that has taken place between us, No. 40.—AGNES.

this impertinence on your part should not for a single moment be tolerated!”

“Oh, call it not impertinence!” said the youth entreatingly: “it is the deep, deep regret—the jealous feeling, if you will—the mingled humiliation and indignation——”

“Giulio, enough!” and the Marchioness again etamped her foot with impatience.

“Lady, you *must* hear me!” said Giulio; “for my narrative will bring me to a concluding incident which more or less regards yourself. Listen then—and I will be brief—very brief! Loving you as I do, my affliction was immense when I perceived that your thoughts were turning towards another. I watched the progress of this new sentiment of your’s; and in watching it, I made a discovery which I little anticipated, and which you, lady, can still less suspect——”

“And that discovery, Giulio?” said the Marchioness, becoming interested in the tale, though

scarcely knowing whether to deem the page sincere or not.

"I will tell you presently," he rejoined. "First of all, in reference to that scene which took place in the gallery, I must inform you, lady, that in a moment of utter despondency and affliction I sought the gallery to gaze upon the portrait which though not painted for yourself, constitutes so marvellous a representation of your own wondrous and striking beauty. I was contemplating this portrait, I say, when the Signora Ciprina entered the gallery. She was on her way to the library: she saw that I was distressed—she paused to question me—she spoke some few words of sympathy—and as I have a soul to be saved, lady, this was all that passed between us! As for love—a single syllable pertaining thereto—or a single look reflecting the sentiment,—may the Evil One himself at this moment seize upon me if aught of all that took place between the Signora Ciprina and myself!"

The Marchioness was staggered by the explanations thus given. She recognised the possibility of their truthfulness—the idea of their possibility was succeeded by that of their probability: but before she admitted that the conviction had now impressed itself on her mind, she was determined to know everything to which Giulio had alluded. She therefore said, "And that discovery which you made,—what was it?"

"The discovery, lady," responded Giulio, "that Edgar Marcellin loves not you, but that he loves the Signora Ciprina. Yes!—and that she herself loves Edgar Marcellin, is a fact equally certain!"

"No, no, Giulio!"—and the Marchioness became for an instant deadly pale; then the next moment she said in a cold low voice contrasting strangely with the former excitement of her look and accents, "you have your own motives, Giulio, for telling me these things—and I may be permitted to judge for myself in respect to the amount of credit to be attached to them!"

"I am speaking truthfully—I swear that I am speaking truthfully!" exclaimed the youthful page. "Oh! I who love so well, can full easily discern the evidences of love on the part of others! The slightest look—the most rapid glance which the eye can throw—the accents of the voice—the flush which flits across the countenance—indeed there are a thousand signs which are either altogether imperceptible to those who love not, or which seem to be the veriest trifles——"

"But even supposing, Giulio," interrupted the Marchioness di Mirano, "that the Signora Ciprina loves Edgar Marcellin, and that he loves her in return,—how does all this concern you? of what avail is the wonderful discovery which you will have thus made?"

"Ah, lady! do you not understand," cried Giulio, "that if it be all as I proclaim, it is in the first place a proof that the Signora Ciprina could have entertained no particular sentiments towards myself——"

"Yes—granting this to be so," said the Marchioness, "what other lesson would you teach me through the same medium? I think you said that you had some incident to announce, to which all this has therefore been only a preface——"

"If your ladyship would have the proof that the brilliant young French gentleman loves the Signora Ciprina, you need but repair to your

villa in the Vale of Arno: for Edgar Marcellin is there!"

"Ah!" said the Marchioness—and the ejaculation was low—half stifled, and deeply concentrated: but so strange a look for an instant swept over her countenance that Giulio was frightened: he had never seen that handsome face wear such a look before—it was as if a tigress had for that single fleeting moment lent the reflection of its own malignant rage to those features whose aspect was wont to be so mild, so gracious, and so pleasing!

But in another instant that expression was altogether gone; and Giulio fancied that he must have been mistaken in supposing it to have existed at all.

"Yes, lady," he continued, "Edgar Marcellin has flown on the wings of love to your beautiful villa in the Vale of Arno; and doubtless at this moment he is clasped in the arms of her whom he adores, in that exquisitely-appointed boudoir where last night I stood for a few minutes in the presence of the Signora Ciprina!"

"Ah! Edgar Marcellin is there!" said Lucrezia di Mirano, in a voice which might now be taken as expressive of apathy and unconcern. "And you perhaps, Giulio, have done this—it was you who brought it about?" she added, inquiringly.

"Yes—it was I, lady!" responded the page. "In thus acting I merely took a leaf out of your own book: I followed the lesson which your ladyship had taught me. You, believing that I loved the Signora Ciprina, took measures to throw me into her arms; and I have now taken measures to throw into her arms the one whom she really and truly loves."

Lucrezia di Mirano remained silent for a few minutes:—her looks were bent downward—her features were perfectly still—it was impossible to judge from their expression what was passing in her thoughts. She seemed to be unmindful of the continued presence of the page in the apartment;—while he watched her countenance with an anxiety showing how uneasy he felt as to the result of the present scene so far as it might regard himself. At the expiration of that long pause Lucrezia slowly raised her eyes; and then suddenly appearing to be reminded that the page was still in the apartment, she said in the kindest possible tone, "My poor Giulio, you love me very much?"

"Oh! I adore you!"—and while the light of the strongest excitement appeared suddenly to flame up in the youth's handsome dark eyes, the glow of joy likewise appeared upon his cheeks, and his whole frame trembled with the agitation of his feelings.

"I cannot blame you, Giulio," continued the Marchioness, still speaking in the same kind tone, "for what you have done in respect to Edgar Marcellin and Ciprina. If they love each other—as you assure me they do—it was an act of kindness thus to throw them together. You are however very much mistaken on one point, my dear boy," added the Marchioness; "and this is to suppose that I entertain any particular regard for M. Marcellin. It is by no means the case! And now let the subject drop between us."

The Marchioness inclined her head with an air of gracious and friendly familiarity, as much as to imply that there was nothing more to be said and

that the youth might retire: but he still lingered—and suddenly throwing himself upon his knees before her, he exclaimed, “Oh! tell me—tell me, how is it henceforth to be between you and me?—for you know, lady, that I love and adore you!”

“Between you and me, Giulio,” replied Lucrezia, “it shall henceforth be just as it has hitherto been. And now let your mind be tranquillized!”

She bent down and dropped a kiss upon his brow as he knelt at her feet: then bidding him rise, she gently pushed him towards the door, so that he was now compelled to retire from the apartment.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE HIDE IN THE MIST.

BE IT remembered that the scene which we have just described, took place in the early part of the forenoon—or, indeed, at about ten o'clock. Hours then passed away; and the Marchioness of Mirano remained at her town mansion, as if thus resolved to leave Ciprina in quiet possession of the villa in the Vale of Arno. Lucrezia did not appear to the eyes of Giulio to be in any way different from what she usually was. Every time he had occasion to enter the drawing-room—where she passed the greater portion of that day, and where she received several visitors—she seemed as if nothing had in any way transpired to disturb or annoy her; so that Giulio began to think that she must really have spoken truly when she declared that he had misjudged her in respect to her sentiments towards Edgar Marcellin.

The evening came; and soon after the dusk began to set in, Lucrezia di Mirano summoned Giulio to the apartment in which she was seated.

“I wish you to proceed for me to the villa, Giulio,” said the Marchioness. “I must write a note to the Signora Ciprina—Indeed, I ought to have done this in the morning after I learnt certain particulars from your lips: but I did not think of it at the time—and then the arrival of visitors directed all my thoughts into other channels—”

“I am ready to set off at once to the villa,” said Giulio; “and by my diligence in repairing thither, will I seek to make up for the delay which has occurred in your ladyship’s thus communicating with the Signora Ciprina. But may I hope that whatsoever I may have done or said will cause no breach between that young lady and yourself?”

“Oh, not the slightest!” exclaimed Lucrezia di Mirano. “On the contrary, the note which I am going to send to the Signora Ciprina, and of which you must be the bearer, is to beg her to use my villa as if it were her own—to remain there so long as a sojourn beneath its roof shall prove agreeable to her—In a word, Giulio, I wish to give Ciprina to understand that she may there enjoy to her heart’s content the companionship of the lover whom she has chosen. My object is twofold. It is not only to place Ciprina entirely at her ease on the point which I have named, but likewise to convince both herself and Edgar Marcellin that I am experiencing no jealous anger on

account of what has happened, and that therefore I never entertained towards M. Marcellin himself any other feeling than that of friendship. Now do you understand me, Giulio?”

“I do, lady,” he replied; “and I will at once become the bearer of the letter.”

“You see, my dear Giulio,” continued Lucrezia, “it ought to have been despatched in the morning; and for more reasons than one I regret the delay which has occurred. However, it cannot now be helped; and I must console myself with the old adage that it is better late than never.”

Having thus spoken, Lucrezia di Mirano penned a few lines to Ciprina; and having sealed the letter, she gave it to Giulio, saying, “You will set off at once—you will not tarry at the villa longer than is necessary to deliver the note and ascertain whether there be any reply—and you will then ride back to Florence.”

“I will execute your ladyship’s commands with zeal and accuracy, in this as in all other respects:”—and with these words Giulio issued from the room.

Ordering a horse to be speedily caparisoned, the young page mounted into the saddle and rode away from the town mansion of his noble mistress. The outskirts of Florence were soon gained; and then Giulio dashed rapidly along the broad open road which led towards the villa in the Vale of Arno. The distance, as we have already said, was about half-a-dozen miles; and the route lay amidst the picturesque scenery of that vale, where the most charming country-seats stand in the midst of gardens which are delightful even in the winter season on account of the evergreens that flourish in such imperishable verdure there. Giulio was now happy. He had played a bold stroke to cause an immense breach betwixt the Marchioness and the brilliant young Frenchman; and he had fully succeeded. But that success had transcended his most sanguine hopes in one important respect,—and this was that he had not injured himself in the estimation of the Marchioness. At least so he thought;—and so, as it would appear, he had reason to think; for had she not spoken kindly to him? had she not promised that henceforth all should be betwixt them as it had hitherto been? and was he not now bent upon the performance of a secret and confidential errand on her behalf? No wonder therefore, if the young page rode along with a light heart, and with feelings very different indeed from those which he had experienced in the morning when he had first sought the presence of his noble mistress to come to explanations with her!

In something less than an hour Giulio reached the villa; and dismounting from his horse, he consigned the animal to a groom, with the intimation that he should require another steed to be in readiness in about a quarter of an hour, as he was to return with the least possible delay to Florence. He then sought Lisette,—the young lady’s-maid who has been before mentioned in connexion with Edgar Marcellin’s admission into the presence of Ciprina. We should here explain that Lisette was of all the abigails either at the villa or the town-mansion, most in the confidence of the Marchioness of Mirano: she had aided her mistress in many an intrigue—her discretion was completely to be relied upon—and she was prepared to assist

the Signora Ciprina just as secretly and faithfully as she had acted towards the Marchioness. But Lisetta was much attached to the handsome Giulio; and thus, when he had sought her services to introduce Edgar Marcellin into Ciprina's presence in the manner already known to the reader, he had not sought in vain. Lisetta was a young woman of about twenty, with a dark complexion and a superb pair of eyes—but in other respects rather interesting than pretty. She had a roguish, *espigle* look; and as the reader may suppose, her virtuous principles were not of the most rigid character—for it was scarcely possible to have been three or four years in the service of Lucrezia di Mirano without having caught the infection of that lady's immorality.

Having given his instructions to the groom, Giulio sought Lisetta; and when they were alone together, he inquired how matters had progressed in reference to Edgar Marcellin?

"M. Marcellin is still here," responded Lisetta: "but he is going to take his departure presently—for his horse has been ordered."

"Ah! he is going to take his departure?" said Giulio. "But has he been here all day—since the morning—in the boudoir with Ciprina? Tell me, is it so, Lisetta?"

"It is so," answered the young woman. "And now would you be kind enough to tell me something in your turn, you wicked mischievous boy!" continued Lisetta, with arch good humour. "How was it that you knew M. Marcellin would come and ask to see my mistress, thereby meaning the Marchioness?—and why?"

"Don't ask me any questions now, Lisetta," interrupted Giulio. "Another time I will give you all explanations! You see that I have not a minute to spare on the present occasion; for when my mission is accomplished I must ride back in all haste to Florence. Hasten and give this note to the Signora Ciprina; and tell her that I wait to bear back to the Marchioness whatsoever answer there may be."

Lisetta took the note and proceeded to the boudoir. In a few minutes she returned, with an intimation that there was no answer beyond the presentation of the kindest regards of the Signora Ciprina to the Marchioness of Mirano. Giulio accordingly prepared to take his departure: he bade farewell to Lisetta—he proceeded to the stables, where he found a horse in readiness for himself, and another groom holding the steed of Edgar Marcellin; for this gentleman was likewise about to return to Florence. Giulio did not care to fall in with him: he therefore quickly mounted the steed that was prepared for his own use: and he rode away from the premises.

But the youth's course was not pursued so rapidly in the homeward direction as it had been when riding from Florence to the villa; for a deep mist was now settling over the Vale of Arno. This description of mist frequently makes its appearance with extraordinary suddenness in that district: and on occasions it attains almost the density of a London fog. It was thus increasing in thickness as the page rode away from the villa; but as the route was perfectly familiar to him, he experienced no apprehension: he merely felt himself necessitated to proceed with the utmost caution. The obscurity was completely hemming

him in: trees, villas, boundary-walls, and all objects that usually greeted the eyes, were lost in that depth of gloom through which no light of moon nor star could penetrate. It was almost the same as a London fog, with this difference—that instead of being yellow it was white, and the eye could see for a distance of about a couple of yards around.

Giulio had left the villa about a quarter of an hour, when he heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs coming from behind; and he felt convinced that this traveller must be M. Marcellin. Nor was he mistaken; for the handsome young Frenchman speedily overtook the youth.

"It is you, Giulio," he said in a blithe voice,—"is it not? Yes, to be sure!—but through this infernal mist it would be scarcely possible to recognise one's own father at a distance of three or four feet! However, I thought it must be you when first your form began to emerge from the gloom, because I was informed at the villa that you had just been and just left."

"And you, Signor," said Giulio, "seem to ride with tolerable fearlessness through this mist; for you were advancing at a smart trot when you overtook me—whereas I was walking my horse."

"Pshaw! do you think I am afraid?" exclaimed Edgar, with a laugh of reckless gaiety. "Though I have travelled the route but once, yet can I well rely on the sagacity of this steed of mine. And then too, I have such a lightness of heart that I am in a mood rather to enjoy the excitement of a little danger than to shrink from it! When one has been basking for hours in the rays of beauty's eyes—reclining in her arms——"

"Yes, Signor," said Giulio, "you have every reason to be happy; for the Signora Ciprina loves you dearly!"

"You, my lad, must lead a singular life," said Edgar Marcellin, "performing the part of a messenger of love for those two beautiful women! If I were in your place, I should be bewildered and intoxicated——"

"It does not become me, Signor, who am only a menial," said Giulio seriously, "to discuss such questions or enter on such discourse as this."

"By heaven, this is excellent, most sedate and virtuous of pages!" cried the gay Frenchman, laughing so merrily that his voice literally rang in waves of harmonious sound through the deepening mist. "Such delicacy on your part is almost as misplaced as prudery would be on the part of either of the ladies you serve!"

"Excuse me, Signor, for remarking," said Giulio, "that it is neither generous nor honourable on your part to speak with such levity of those two ladies. The Marchioness di Mirano has received you as a guest at her mansion——"

"And her friend the beautiful Ciprina has received me in her arms at the villa," exclaimed Edgar Marcellin. "But for the life of me there is something in all this which I can barely understand, and which I shall be too glad to have explained. I am therefore well pleased to have overtaken you, most discreet and fastidious of all pages!"

"Signor," exclaimed Giulio, all his warm Italian blood glowing in his veins, "if it be your purpose to insult me——"

"Hah! hah! hah!"—and Edgar Marcellin now

literally reeled in his saddle as he thus sent forth the merriest peals of laughter. "What! insult a page—a lacquey—a menial—a valet! This is indeed excellent! Truly, I have come to Italy to learn some things which were utterly unknown to me in France! The idea of a page suddenly turning round upon you and considering himself insulted! But really, my good young man, I did not mean to wound your feelings; and I do not mean to wound them now. On the contrary, I owe you an immense debt of gratitude for having this morning borne me the message of love which led me to the villa to find myself clasped in the arms of that beautiful Ciprina. Therefore I am about to make you a present of some half-dozen pieces of gold——"

"I require not your gold, Signor," replied Giulio, with proud and scornful accents.

Again did the gay, light-hearted, thoughtless Frenchman laugh merrily; and then he said, "You are the most singular of all pages: but I dare swear that we shall be very good friends in the long run! And now be so kind as to answer me a question or two, that I may know precisely how I am situated and how I am to act. Is your mistress Lucrezia di Mirano a veritable Marchioness? Is she a lady of real fortune? and is the Signora Ciprina also in a condition of pecuniary independence? Or is it all the reverse? and is the magnificence of the town-mansion, as well as the elegant luxury of the country villa, sustained by such little affairs of gallantry as the one in which I find myself involved? For if so, I shall with the utmost pleasure remit to-morrow a draft upon my banker for a handsome amount——"

"Good heavens, Signor!" exclaimed Giulio, "to what insulting language are you giving vent! My noble mistress is a veritable Marchioness, bearing one of the proudest titles in Italy——"

"Still she may be an adventuress in money matters," said Edgar: "for at Madrid I have seen a Hidalgo, with the blood of a dozen ducal families in his veins, standing at the door of a church to receive alms from the friends who had known him in better days."

"Signor," said Giulio, "I had formed of you a very different opinion from that which I now entertain: I thought that you were a gentleman of delicate feelings, refined taste——"

"Ah! am I now to be subjected to the process of a lecture?" exclaimed Edgar, again laughing. "You are the most extraordinary of all pages! But do not be offended with me—and let us understand each other. If it be all love on the beautiful Ciprina's side, and no selfish interest, I shall be all the better pleased; for I have really taken a great fancy to the young lady. But if money be required, rest assured that it will be with no niggard hand that I shall pay for the blandishments bestowed upon me."

"Enough, Signor!" ejaculated Giulio: "you have made my blood boil to such a pitch that all page though I am, and highly placed though you may be——yet——"

"Curb this hot temper of your's, my good boy," said Marcellin. "I really mean no offence!—I only desire to know how I may act——"

"And you have been told," interjected Giulio curtly.

"Good!" said Marcellin: "but you will admit

that if I had not sought the information, I should still have been in doubt and uncertainty on the point; for if such an adventure had occurred to me in my own native France, I should at once conceive that though there might be an immense talk of love on the part of the fair one, yet that the thoughts were mainly bent on bank-notes. However, in respect to my present adventure, you have set my mind at rest. And now if you will so far condescend," continued Edgar Marcellin, with a sort of good-humoured irony, "to slip these eight or ten pieces of gold into your pocket——"

"I want them not! I will not take them!" ejaculated Giulio: and he somewhat violently repelled the hand that was stretched out towards him.

The effect was to make Edgar Marcellin drop the golden coins which he held in his hand; and the proceeding on Giulio's part filled the Frenchman with amazement and anger.

"What!" he ejaculated; "a low-born menial behave thus to a gentleman!"—and in his rage he struck Giulio a violent blow across the cheek with his riding-whip.

Smarting with pain, the young page dealt the irritable Frenchman two or three severe strokes in quick succession with his own whip; and Marcellin vociferated, "Be quiet! I cannot fight with a lacquey!"

"Now, Signor," said Giulio, "let us separate. We have been long enough together—too long indeed!—and the next time we meet I trust that even though I be no more than a page, you will treat me with the civility and respect which one man owes to another."

"By heaven, young fellow!" exclaimed Edgar Marcellin, in a tone that vibrated with rage, "I will be signally revenged for the blows you have inflicted upon me!"

Having thus spoken, Edgar Marcellin galloped away, rushing on madly through the mist as if it were all as clear as day and there was not the slightest danger to be incurred. He did not tarry to alight and pick up the gold coins which had fallen in the road: while Giulio treated them with an equal degree of contempt.

The young page belonged to a very good family which had become impoverished: he was born and educated as a gentleman; and thus he had his strong feelings of pride, which perhaps indeed were all the more sensitive when he was reminded of the humble grade of society that he now occupied. In his own heart he felt himself to be something much higher than a mere page or menial—for he was the lover of the Marchioness: and thus doubly harrowing to his feelings was any taunt thrown out against him on account of his state of servitude. Not for worlds would he receive or touch Edgar Marcellin's gold; and he now only regretted that he had not been enabled to inflict a much severer chastisement than he had bestowed upon the French gentleman.

Giulio rode onward—but at a cautious pace; for the density of the mist decreased not, and he was not of the same reckless, daring, headstrong disposition as Edgar Marcellin. Besides, Giulio had no faith in the superior sagacity of his own steed; and he chose not to incur any unnecessary peril, while he knew that complete safety consisted in advancing at a slow rate.

More than half the distance had been accomplished—Giulio was still proceeding through the mist, when he thought he heard the sounds of a horse's feet a little way ahead. He listened—for if it were an equipage that was approaching, he was prepared to move completely over to the proper side of the road so as to allow it to pass: but he soon became convinced that it was a single steed which was drawing near, and no vehicle of any kind. In a few minutes the form of a horseman, mounted on the approaching animal, emerged from the surrounding gloom and burst upon the view of the youthful page.

"Ah!" was the ejaculation which burst forth from his lips: but the next instant there was the report of a pistol—a wild cry thrilled from Giulio's tongue—and he fell from his steed, a corpse!

The assassin at once turned and galloped away, through the deep mist in the direction of Florence; and the unfortunate page was thus left on the spot where he fell—so that it seemed as if the foul crime were to remain enveloped in a gloom as deep as the mist which shrouded the scene itself at the time!

It was not until sunrise that this deep mist began to clear away from the Vale of Arno; and thus for many long hours had it overspread the spot where the foul murder was perpetrated. But passing away from thence, we must return into the city of Florence and again speak of Lucrezia di Mirano. She rose at her usual hour in the morning: she summoned her handmaidens—and when they made their appearance, she inquired if Giulio had returned from the villa?

"No, my lady," replied one of the damsels: "but report says that the mist has only begun to clear away within the last hour or two—and that is in the neighbourhood of Florence; so that at a distance of a few miles it may still be as dense as ever."

"True!" said Lucrezia. "He will return presently, so soon as the mist shall have fully cleared away. Let me know the instant he enters the house, because I expect him to be the bearer of a note from my beloved friend the Signora Ciprina."

An hour passed—Lucrezia's toilet was performed—and she proceeded to the room where the morning repast was served up. She lingered, as was her custom, over the meal, which consisted of the most exquisite little delicacies, various in their assortment, and of a light quality as best fitted for the first repast of the day: there were several letters from friends and acquaintances to read—there were newspapers and reviews to glance over. Thus the time passed: it was now eleven in the forenoon; and Giulio had not returned. The Marchioness rang the bell and put the inquiry.

"No, my lady," said the footman who answered the summons. "Giulio has not come back; but the mist has all cleared away some hours ago out of the Vale, as I have been assured by several persons."

"This is strange!" said the Marchioness. "Let somebody proceed on horseback to the villa and make inquiries. I should scarcely think that Giulio would have left last night when the mist came on: but if he did, then the matter will become most serious—for there can only be one conclusion to which we can arrive, and that is that he must have

experienced some accident. Therefore let every inquiry be made and every search be instituted, in case circumstances should unfortunately seem to justify apprehensions of the worst."

The domestic bowed and retired. In about ten minutes the door of the apartment was again opened, and M. Marcellin was announced. Lucrezia di Mirano rose from her seat to welcome him in the politest manner possible: but she saw that there was something strange and excited in his manner, though he was as politely courteous and as friendly as his demeanour was wont to be.

"My lady," he said, "I ought to commence by apologizing for paying a visit at this unbecomingly hour—barely half-past eleven in the forenoon," he continued, consulting his watch: "but there is more than one reason which has induced me thus to intrude—"

"My dear M. Marcellin," interrupted Lucrezia, "do you call it an intrusion when you have received my free permission to visit this house at any time?"

"True, my lady," said the young Frenchman; "I will not therefore waste time by proffering any excuse for my early visit now. Be not startled, Signora, if with some degree of abruptness I proclaim that I am a man of honour; because such an assurance may best serve as a preface to what I have next to say."

"Such an assurance is altogether unnecessary here," said the Marchioness di Mirano, with an air of the supremest surprise; "for if it were not known at the outset that you were a gentleman of the strictest honour and of the highest character, you would not have obtained an introduction within the walls of the Mirano mansion."

"A man may be honourable in money-matters, or in his dealings with the world in general," said Edgar Marcellin: "but still it by no means follows that he should be honourable in those little private affairs and intercourses which are veiled from the general view. Now, I flatter myself that I am an honourable man in these latter respects as well as in the former—At least I strive to be so; and of this I am about to give a proof."

"You really astonish me by the seriousness and gravity with which you are speaking," exclaimed Lucrezia. "Do tell me, are you in earnest, M. Marcellin? or is this some jest which you, naturally gay, lively, and mirthfully inclined as you are—"

"Signora, it is no jest!" interrupted Edgar: "and I will at once come to the point. Perhaps there has been in my conduct something to lead you to suppose that being smitten with your beauty, I was paying particular attentions—and indeed that I had already significantly—"

"Oh! I can assure you," interrupted the Marchioness, "I attached not the slightest importance—"

"And yet methought," said the young Frenchman, "that you bent upon me encouraging looks—that you seemed—But I dare not push my explanations any further! If I have indeed all along misinterpreted—"

"Oh! M. Marcellin," interrupted Lucrezia with a certain degree of dignity and seriousness, "you must indeed have misinterpreted my conduct, if you suppose that it was influenced by

any other motives than those of hospitality and friendship towards you as a stranger in Florence."

"Signora," said Marcellio, "I am glad to receive this assurance. My vanity had been deceiving me somewhat: I am glad that I am disabused! The explanation I have now to give is simple—and in all candour it must be given. It is that there is another lady who has demanded my fealty and my homage; and I have consented to wear the chains which her beauty has thrown around my heart."

"I congratulate you, M. Marcellin," said Lucrezia, with a smile which seemed most unselfishly amiable, "on having formed such a pleasant *liaison*: for I do not suppose that you are alluding to matrimony?"

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Edgar. "It is one of these *liaisons* which are not altogether unknown in French society, but which in Italy are far more deliciously frequent."

"And pray might I ask," said Lucrezia, "who is the fair charmer?"

"It was precisely because I intended to make the revelation," interjected Edgar, "that I pre-faced it with so many apologies. Now, however, that your ladyship has given me the assurance that you beheld nothing serious in my little gallant attentions, and that you yourself in reality meant nothing when you seemed to encourage them, I have all the less hesitation and difficulty in mentioning the name of the beautiful Ciprina."

"Indeed!" said the Marchioness. "Again do I congratulate you on your success; for she is the most beautiful creature in Florence. But I must congratulate her likewise on having achieved this conquest over the brilliant M. Marcellin!"

The Frenchman bowed; and then proceeded to say, "But there is another point on which I came to speak to your ladyship:"—and now Edgar's countenance again grew excited and troubled.

"I see, M. Marcellin," said the Marchioness, "that this second topic, whatever it be, is far less pleasurable than the former one. Has anything distressed you?"

"What would your ladyship think if I were to tell you that a base hound of a page—a valet—a lacquey—or whatever he may be—has laid his hands upon me! Or not exactly his hands—but worse!—his riding-whip!"

"Indeed, M. Marcellin!" cried Lucrezia, with an air of the most unfeigned surprise: "is this possible? has such a thing happened?"

"It has happened, Signora! by heaven it has!" exclaimed Edgar, vehemently. "Believe me when I tell you that I am no more deficient in courage than any other individual bearing the name of Frenchman; and you know that the French have not often been reproached either individually or nationally for a lack of courage. Well then, Signora, if I had been so insulted by an equal—by one in whose veins rolls gentle blood—I would have challenged him!—with pistol or with sword would we have met!—and the two should not have quitted the field alive! But it is now different. It is a vile page who has done this!—and the only means by which he can be chastised, is by ignominious expulsion from the house in which his menial services are given."

"Am I to infer from all this," said the Mar-

chioness, "that it is a domestic of mine who has behaved in so infamous a manner?"

"Yes—a domestic of your ladyship's," replied Edgar.

"Then rest assured, M. Marcellin, that not merely shall he be dismissed from my service, but that measures shall be taken, if you will, to chastise him with imprisonment. But, who is he. Can you name the offender, or point him out?"

"His name is Giulio, my lady," rejoined Marcellin.

"What!" exclaimed Lucrezia: "Giulio to have done this? No, no! it is scarcely possible! He has ever been a good, docile, inoffensive lad—But when did this happen?"

"Last night, Signora," proceeded Marcellin. "To confess the truth, I was at your villa—I passed the day there with Ciprina: in the evening Giulio came, the bearer of a kindly written note from yourself to Ciprina. She showed it to me: it expressed the hope that she was well and comfortable, and that she had all that she required at the villa——"

"True," said the Marchioness: "it was in this sense that I wrote to her."

"She sent her affectionate regards, accompanied by a promise to write to you to-day if she did not see you. Then Giulio," continued Marcellin, "took his departure——"

"What! last night?" exclaimed the Marchioness.

"Yes, to be sure!" replied Edgar. "I am speaking of last night!"

"Last night?" repeated Lucrezia. "Giulio set out, you say, to return to Florence last night?"

"Most assuredly! I overtook him on the road—he was riding with a timidity at which I was astonished——"

"Perhaps the mist was dense?" said the Marchioness.

"So thick," rejoined Edgar, "that you could not see half-a-dozen feet in front of you. Well, I overtook Giulio, as I say; I exchanged a few words with him. It suited me to make him a present; I offered him some eight or ten pieces of gold—he scorned and despised my bounty—his conduct was most outrageous! He even dashed the gold from my hand!"

"Yes, this was indeed monstrous," exclaimed the Marchioness. "But pray continue; for we have been very uneasy——"

"To tell the truth," continued Edgar Marcellin, speaking in a rapid and excited tone, "I struck the youth with my whip, for his conduct was most insulting: and then he hit me in return."

"Ah! then you admit, M. Marcellin," said Lucrezia, "that you were the aggressor?"

"Aggressor indeed!" ejaculated Edgar, with a look and tone of contempt. "Who ever styled a gentleman an aggressor when chastising the insolence of a plebeian?"

"Oh! but you must be informed," said the Marchioness, "that Giulio was well born and bred——"

"I found him a menial—and I treated him as such," interrupted Marcellin.

"But how did it end?" demanded Lucrezia; "for I begin to be frightened——"

"There is nothing to be frightened at, my lady," exclaimed Edgar. "If I had chosen to use brute

force, I could no doubt have vanquished the youth in a moment and have broken his own riding-whip as well as my own about his ears. But I forbore from placing myself farther in contact with his plebeian skin; and——"

"And what, M. Marcellin?" cried the Marchioness; "for Giulio has not returned—already were we under the most serious apprehensions—But now—but now, they are increased—they are of a different character——"

"Pshaw!" ejaculated Marcellin, with a laugh which at the moment seemed more brutal than merry: "do you suppose I mur——"

At that very instant the door burst open, and a footman rushed in, exclaiming, "Oh, my lady! Giulio is murdered!"

"Murdered?"—and as she thus echoed the fearful word, a terrific scream burst from Lucrezia di Mirano's lips.

"Murdered!" repeated Edgar Marcellin, with a sudden start: and becoming pale as death, he sank in the seat from which he had sprung up at the sudden opening of the door.

The greatest excitement prevailed in the Mirano mansion. The domestic who had rushed into the room to communicate the awful tidings to the Marchioness, was the one who had set out on horseback, in pursuance of her ladyship's mandates, in order to institute inquiries concerning the absent one. In the ante-room of the apartment into which the man had now burst, a posse of the servants were gathered, having followed him thither. Some of Lucrezia's maids, perceiving that their mistress was about to faint—or at least fancying such might be the catastrophe—now made their appearance; and Lucrezia accompanied them from the apartment. In the ante-room she obtained a bottle of volatile essence, which she applied to her nostrils; and this appeared to revive her. She then demanded explanations relative to the frightful intelligence that had been communicated to her. These were soon given. The domestic who had set out on horseback, had scarcely left the suburbs of Florence behind, when he met a peasant with whom he was acquainted; and stopping to converse with the man, he learned something which speedily gave a fearful interest to the discourse. The peasant reported that soon after sunrise, when the mist began to clear off, a dead body had been found by the roadside about three miles from Florence. It was that of a genteel-looking youth in plain clothes; and as there were no papers about his person to identify him, he was conveyed to a neighbouring cottage until the authorities in Florence could be communicated with. He was beyond the reach of medical aid, having been shot through the heart, so that his death must have proved almost instantaneous. The authorities had sent and fetched the body into the city; and thither it had been transported just before Lucrezia's domestic learnt all these particulars from the peasant. Dreading from the description that it was the unfortunate Giulio who had thus met an untimely and mysterious death, the domestic turned his horse's head and proceeded to the dead-house of the hospital, to which the corpse had been removed. There his worst fears were realized: it was indeed the body of Giulio!

Such were the explanations which the Marchioness di Mirano now received; and they ap-

peared to produce a most powerful effect upon her. At length, seeming to recover her self-possession, she ordered some of her domestics to hasten and fetch the corpse from the hospital dead-house to her own mansion, so that it might receive suitable burial. Having issued this mandate, she returned into the apartment where she had left Edgar Marcellin. Closing the door behind her, she walked straight up to him; and with pale face and rigid features, she said in a deep concentrated voice, "Giulio has been foully murdered!"

Edgar Marcellin was sitting at the time with an air of semi-stupefaction in the same seat where he was when the Marchioness left the room: he now started up, exclaiming, "Yes—unfortunate youth! I heard the terrific announcement that he was murdered! But my God! you do not—— No! no! you cannot suspect——"

"Edgar Marcellin," said Lucrezia emphatically, and with even an expression of fierceness in her countenance, "you stand in a position which is awful to contemplate——"

"Signora," interrupted the young Frenchman, with a look which she suddenly appeared to be seeking to render as calm as possible, "I am innocent of this horrible crime! Good God! I am as incapable of it as you yourself are!"

"I hope, M. Marcellin," said Lucrezia, with an air so severe and cold as fully to imply that she did not believe this averment of innocence, "that you will be enabled to make all this good in the presence of the magistrate, before whom you will assuredly have to appear. For alas! I regret that you should have told me the tale of your quarrel with my page; it will compel me also to appear—and nothing can be more unpleasant——"

"Good God, Signora!" cried Edgar Marcellin; "you do not invest my comparatively trumpery quarrel with your page with so tremendous an importance?"

"You yourself, M. Marcellin, invested it with all that importance," said Lucrezia; "for you came to me with an excited and troubled manner——"

"Yes—but it was to make complaint that I came!" interjected Edgar, "not dreaming that the unfortunate Giulio had ceased to exist! What other motive could I have had?"

"I much fear," said the Marchioness, "that a judge would regard your conduct in this respect to be nothing but a blind—an endeavour to avert suspicion——"

"Oh, but all this is monstrous!" exclaimed Edgar Marcellin, his cheeks flushing and his eyes flashing.

"Now listen to me!" said the Marchioness, speaking in a rapid and excited manner. "It would be most painful for me to be compelled to go forward to repeat the tale which you have told me—it might lead to the exposure of everything in respect to yourself and Ciprina—her reputation would be ruined—mine would suffer, I being her friend and she living with me! All this would be fearful! But still more fearful would it be for you to be consigned to a dungeon—to undergo the ordeal of trial—for whether guilty or innocent this would inevitably be the case——"

"My God! do you think so?" murmured Edgar, looking horror-stricken.

"Alas! alas! I am sure of it!" rejoined Lu-



crezia, growing more and more agitated. "Ah! you know not what Italian justice is—what Italian law is—what Florentine tribunals are!—No! and you know not what Florentine dungeons are!"

"Oh, but I am innocent!" murmured the wretched young Frenchman: "I am innocent! I could look the whole world in the face——"

"What! when you more than half confessed to me that in your rage you would not touch his plebeian skin, but that you murdered him with a pistol?"

"My God! I never said a word of all the latter part of that sentence! You have put it into my mouth!" exclaimed Edgar wildly: "but you could not—no, you would not go forward and declare that I said it! You are mistaken! I do not for a moment mean that you wilfully misunderstand or misrepresent me; but you are in error! Oh, believe me, you are in error!—and I beseech you

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to think well of it; for remember, it is the life of a fellow-creature which may possibly be compromised!"

"And I," said the Marchioness, "am utterly incapable of wilfully misrepresenting you: but you did make such an admission!—and when my servant burst into the room, you were confounded and dismayed—your whole appearance testified to your guilt!"

"No! no!"—and Edgar shuddered visibly with excitement.

"Foolish and insensate man!" responded the Marchioness, "all circumstances are against you! Remain in Florence, and I must tell all I know: my duty to society demands this much on my part! But fly from Florence, and it will be useless for me to make any revelation at all since it will lead to naught! Now, Edgar Marcellin, the alternatives are before you, and you can choose! At all events there is the door of this apartment—and I

command you to quit my presence: I can endure you no longer here!"

"I go, I go!" exclaimed Marcellin, fearfully agitated. "But as there is a God above us——"

"Enough!" interrupted Lucrezia, with a stern dignity: "I am not your judge! Depart, I say!"—and she extended her arm towards the door.

"My brain is reeling—I know not what I do! Surely this is madness!"—and Edgar Marcellin pressed his hand to his brow as he leant against a chair for support.

"Depart!" again said Lucrezia di Mirano, in a stern commanding tone: and again was her arm extended towards the door.

A groan—a piteous groan burst from the lips of Edgar Marcellin: he endeavoured to speak—he could not: and opening the door, he rushed forth.

An hour afterwards it was generally known throughout the fashionable circles of Florence, that Edgar Marcellin had abruptly quitted the capital. But this departure was in general by no means connected with the murder of the young page; M. Marcellin had liberally and honourably paid whatever liabilities he had contracted during his short sojourn in Florence, and he was regarded as a strictly honourable man. The Marchioness kept the secret of what she knew or what she suspected (whichever it really amounted to)—save in reference to Ciprina, to whom in the strictest confidence she communicated the circumstances connected with Edgar Marcellin's departure in so hurried a manner from the Tuscan metropolis.

CHAPTER LIV.

WINIFRED AND RODERICK.

THE Italian episodes of our narrative have extended to a considerable length; and the last incidents which we have recorded, bring us down to the middle of February of the year 1849. It is consequently more than two months, so far as the progress of our tale is concerned, since the attention of the reader was diverted from the scenes occurring in the British metropolis;—and it is now therefore time that we should hasten back thither with the least possible delay.

Contemporaneous with the events of the preceding chapter are the scenes of which we are now about to speak. It was, then, about the middle of February, 1849—in the forenoon of a day of intense cold, with the snow upon the ground—that Winifred Barrington was walking hastily along in the neighbourhood of St. John's Wood. The young maiden was appressed with her usual simplicity and neatness: she looked well in health—and the expression of her countenance was indicative of mental tranquillity. Upon her cheeks, which were usually pale, now rested the glow of rich carnation produced by the excitement of walking on that cold day, and through that crisp bracing atmosphere; so that with this colour Winifred looked better and more interesting than usual.

She was proceeding in the direction of Sidney Villa, when she beheld at a distance a form—a well-known form—advancing along the road. Her heart began to beat violently; for the appearance

of that individual never failed to inspire strong emotions in the bosom of Winifred Barrington. This personage was Roderick Dalham, whom we have on a former occasion described to the reader as being a man of about forty years of age—of slim symmetrical figure—with a tolerably handsome countenance—dark hair and whiskers—and large piercing black eyes. We have also said that his was a countenance the expression of which indicated strong passions, capable of being impelled to the extremity of either good or evil, according to the influence of circumstances. But we should add that although in the earlier part of his life he had been dissipated, wild, and extravagant, yet that of late he had changed into as completely an opposite course of steadiness, regularity, and propriety; for there was much natural generosity in the soul of Roderick Dalham, associated with the strictest sense of honour—so that he was one of those men who after having "sown their wild oats," as the phrase goes, often become the best and worthiest members of society.

On beholding Mr. Dalham at a distance, Winifred Barrington stopped short: the colour for an instant quitted her cheeks—but the next moment it returned with even a deeper carnation vividness than before; and she continued her way slowly at first—and then at a quickened pace—for the thought suddenly struck her that she must not show herself an ungrateful laggard in greeting the generous benefactor to whom she was indebted for the salvation of her life from the hangman's eldritch. Therefore, with this thought in her mind, Winifred now sped forward: Roderick Dalham came on with even still greater speed to meet her; and it was all breathless with her haste and with excitement that the young maiden encountered the gentleman. The colour was now of the deepest carnation on her cheeks; her moist red lips were apart as she gasped for breath, and they revealed a set of the most beautiful teeth; her large blue eyes were bright with animation; and a stray light brown curl coming over her forehead, was put back by the beautiful hand which she had ungloved in order that she might with the more grateful courtesy bestow it upon the benefactor whom she was hastening forward to meet. Thus, never in Roderick Dalham's estimation had Winifred appeared so interesting. Handsome she was not—neither was she beautiful: but most interesting she assuredly was—while her figure, with its softly rounded contours, was symmetry itself.

"Winifred," said Mr. Dalham, "it is thus by accident we meet!"—and it was with considerable embarrassment of manner that he thus spoke—with a certain constraint of look likewise—and even with a tremulousness of accent; though there was warmth, and even fervour, in the pressure which he bestowed upon the small beautiful white hand that lingered in the clasp of his own.

"Yes, Mr. Dalham," said Winifred: "I certainly did not expect—I mean I did not think it at all likely——"

"And perhaps you did not wish to see me, Winifred?" interjected Roderick Dalham, half reproachfully, half deprecatingly: "you have perhaps been offended with me——"

"Oh, Mr. Dalham! how can you entertain such an idea?" cried Winifred, distressed by that which struck her as an accusation of ingratitude. "You

must know how deeply I am sensible of the immense obligations——"

"Yes, Winifred," said Roderick Dalham, gazing upon her countenance with that scarcely explicable degree of interest which has both sadness and pleasure mingled with its admiration. "know that you possess a grateful heart: but still, Winifred, you must have thought my last proceeding so very, very strange towards you—your pride may have been wounded—your feelings may have been outraged——"

"Oh, my pride!" exclaimed Winifred: "what pride have I that can be wounded?—and as for my feelings, what feelings do I possess which have not already been dragged through the most scathing, withering, crushing ordeal?"

"There, Winifred! you are offended with me!" exclaimed Roderick Dalham, looking distressed. "You speak with exceeding bitterness; and it cuts me to the very soul to hear this language flow from your lips—or to behold those lips wreath otherwise than in sweet smiles!"

"Oh, Mr. Dalham!" cried Winifred, with a countenance which denoted a distress that was even far more poignant than his own; "pardon me—forgive me—I beseech you!" and she clasped her hands entreatingly. "What! I have spoken bitterly to *you*!—to *you*, my dearest and best friend! Oh! God forgive me for so much wickedness!"

She sobbed audibly: she seemed as if she should sink down overwhelmed by the sudden paroxysm of grief which had seized upon her.

"Winifred, dearest girl—for heaven's sake compose yourself," said Roderick Dalham, taking both her hands and pressing them in his own: "I did not wish to accuse you—I did not mean it! No, no, my sweet girl! I know how terribly you have been tried in so many, many different ways——"

"And you do not believe, Mr. Dalham," said Winifred, looking up earnestly and entreatingly into his countenance, while the heaven of her eyes was seen through the shower of her weeping,—"and you do not believe that I am capable of ingratitude towards you?"

"I would sooner believe in the veriest impossibility," replied Roderick Dalham, with the strongest emphasis, "than entertain such an opinion of you, dear Winifred! You know that I love you," he went on to say, as his voice sank to a lower and more tender tone: "yes—you know that I love you—you know that the feeling of interest which I first experienced in your behalf gradually deepened into a sentiment of tenderness,—and by heaven, Winifred! though upwards of two long months have elapsed since last I saw you—and though during this time I have not sought you, but rather on the contrary have avoided the chance of encountering you,—yet has my love deepened, and during that interval your image has become all the more profoundly impressed upon my mind. But Oh! I ought not to be speaking thus!—for it was in order to avoid such a scene as this that I have for upwards of two months kept myself as if utterly estranged!"

"And I, Mr. Dalham," murmured Winifred, with eyes bashfully downcast, "should have thought that you were offended with me for some reason or another—only that every now and then I learnt from Mr. Wardour that you had called at his

office to make inquiries concerning me—that, as usual, you had spoken in the kindest and most friendly terms—and therefore, Mr. Dalham—therefore I knew—or at least I thought and flattered myself," proceeded Winifred falteringly and hesitatingly, "that you could not be offended with me!"

"Offended with you, Winifred? Good heavens! how was this possible?" exclaimed Roderick Dalham. "If any offence were to be taken, it was *you* who had so much reason to be offended with *me*!"

"Never, never!" cried Winifred emphatically. "I knew that you must have had some good reason for not keeping the appointment which I gave you," she continued; "and that was sufficient for me. But even if I had thought—which was indeed impossible—but even if I *had* thought, I say, that you were at all slighting me at the time, I could not have been offended. Good heavens, no!—for ever present in my mind is the immensity of the good which you have done me!"

"Generous girl that you are thus to speak!" exclaimed Dalham, taking her hand and pressing it with effusion. "But I owe you some little explanation—and I beseech you to let me give it."

"Not unless you think fit, Mr. Dalham," answered Winifred; "for where no offence has been taken, no explanation need be given. And do you for a moment think that I should seek to exact any explanation from your lips when all your conduct towards me has been so noble and so magnanimous in great things, that it were impossible to prove otherwise in small things!"

"Still let me give you this explanation, Winifred," said Mr. Dalham. "Take my arm—we will walk slowly onward, for we may be observed standing here together, and it would seem strange that we should linger so long in conversation on a day of such bitter inclemency as this."

The young maiden took Roderick Dalham's arm; and they walked slowly along together. There was a silence for two or three minutes; but it was at length broken by the gentleman himself.

"Excuse me, Winifred," he said, "if in what I am about to say there may be some slight reference to past incidents. It is upwards of three months, Winifred, since I called upon you at your lodgings——"

"Yes," she murmured: "it was on the sixth of November—the day after the trial!"

"And on that day," resumed Roderick Dalham, "I offered you my hand—I declared that I loved you—I proposed that we should wed in secret, so that neither my father nor your grandsire should become acquainted with this alliance. And you refused!—and at the same time you confessed that you loved your cousin Gustavus."

Winifred heaved a profound sigh; and as she leant upon Mr. Dalham's arm, he felt her bosom swell against it with that convulsing emotion.

"Pardon me, Winifred," he hastened to say, "for alluding to things that are calculated to excite affliction and distress——"

"On this score, Mr. Dalham," interrupted Winifred, "I require not your sympathy—I need it not—Oh! believe me, I need it not! If the name of Gustavus excite an emotion within me, it is not because I am afflicted on my own

account; but it is because I tremble with apprehension lest his happiness should have been compromised by wedding her—that quadron lady—who came across the seas to seek him——”

“But in reference to yourself, Winifred,” said Mr. Dalham, “do you not feel that you still love your cousin Gustavus?”

“Yes, as a cousin,” she responded; “or as a sister might love a brother: but—but”—she hesitated for a moment, and then she added with firmness, “But all other love has ceased to exist within me towards Gustavus Barrington!”

“Winifred, is this possible?” exclaimed Roderick Dalham, in a tone which thrilled with joy.

“It is true, sir,” answered Winifred. “I think you know me well enough to be convinced that I am incapable of falsehood?”

“Yes, yes, Winifred—I know that you are incapable of all deceit!—and the natural frankness of your character constitutes not the least of those good qualities which have charmed me. But let me continue my own explanation. I have said that it was on the sixth of November——”

“The day after the trial,” added Winifred softly, “when you saved my life!”

“It was on the sixth of November,” continued Dalham hastily, “that I offered you my hand, and you refused me. Precisely one month afterwards—it was the sixth of December, Winifred—Oh, I remember it well!—I met you in Aldersgate Street. We walked arm-in-arm together, as we are walking now; and I again asked you to accompany me secretly to the altar. I besought you to become my wife in all honour though in privacy! You did not refuse me then, Winifred,” continued Dalham; “but you asked for time to reflect upon all I had told you. You asked for a day or an hour: I bade you take a day or a week;—and then you said to me—and I remember that your voice was low but firm, ‘To-morrow at this time my decision shall be made known. Meet me here!’—It was thus you spoke.”

“Yes,” said Winifred: “I remember full well it was in those terms that I spoke. And—and Mr. Dalham, on the following day I was there—true to the appointment—on that very spot where we had parted!”

“And I was *not* there, Winifred,” exclaimed Dalham; “and I am about to tell you why I was not there! Oh, you have already assured me that you did not regard it as a slight nor as an outrage—that you did not take offence thereat—but on the contrary that you knew there must be some good reason for what I did:—and you were right, Winifred! Yes, I had a good reason! Listen with attention. If I had met you on the following day, you would have made known your decision. If that decision were to be a negative, I knew that it would pain you infinitely to give it; and therefore I was anxious to save you that affliction. But if on the other hand it was an affirmative which you were prepared to proclaim, then I thought to myself that it would only be the generous sacrifice of your feelings to a sense of gratitude. I remembered that you had told me how I had saved your life, and that therefore you were ready to lay down that life for my sake; and I thought that even that very assurance itself conveyed a species of prayer that I would use my power generously and magnanimously. But this

was not all, Winifred. Do you recollect the discourse which we held together on that last occasion when we met—that 6th of December, which date seems to have been so strongly impressed upon the memory of us both? I told you that I had only very recently obtained an insight into my father’s affairs, and I had discovered that if by the law’s decree he should be compelled to surrender up the estates which he had so long enjoyed, ruin would stare him in the face—which ruin, as a natural consequence, would redound upon me! Do you remember, Winifred, that I told you all this?”

“Good heavens, Mr. Dalham!” she murmured, shuddering perceptibly with her feelings of affliction, “is it possible I could have forgotten anything which so nearly concerns yourself? No, no! I have never ceased to think of it; and when at the time——”

“Listen to me, Winifred,” interrupted Dalham, “and hear me to the end. When I told you of this discovery which I had made of my father’s perilous circumstances and uncertain fortunes, I used it as an argument to induce you to bestow your hand upon me. I knew that the lawsuit must speedily be decided: I therefore said to you, ‘If it result in my father’s favour, you will in due time be enriched through me, should I become your husband: but if on the other hand it result in your grandfather’s favour, I shall continue rich through you, if you become my wife.’—It was thus that I spoke to you; and it was then that you told me your decision should be given on the morrow. But when we separated I thought to myself that my conduct had not been just or generous towards you. I said to myself, ‘I am not dealing properly with Winifred; I am endeavouring to coerce her into an alliance with me. I know the gratitude of her heart; and I am appealing strongly unto it. Circumstances have given me a power and an influence over her; and I am using that power ungenerously—I am exerting that influence selfishly. If I meet her to-morrow to hear her decision, and if she say *No*, it will pain her infinitely to breathe that word from her lips: and if on the other hand she say *Yes*, ’twill be a syllable spoken with the sense of self-sacrifice and self-martyrdom.’—Therefore, Winifred, I did not keep the appointment. God knows how it pained me to forego the chance of happiness which perhaps might have been within my reach: but yet I was resolved to perform the more generous part—I would not coerce you into an union with me!”

There was silence for nearly a minute—for Winifred knew not what answer to make to these explanations which she had just received: she knew not indeed whether they were intended as a final settlement of the entire question to which they alluded, or whether that question being altogether reopened, might necessarily and naturally elicit comment from her tongue.

“I was awayed likewise by other considerations in the course which I then adopted,” at length resumed Roderick Dalham. “I said to myself, ‘Perhaps Winifred will think that I am now influenced by selfish motives: she may suppose that as the result of the lawsuit may possibly beggar my father, I am seeking to take care of myself by marrying into the very family to whose hands

the estates may probably pass.—And then too I met Mr. Wardour, and he told me that he had that very day lodged in your name in the Bank of England the sum of fourteen thousand five hundred pounds, the produce of the sale of the gold dust; so that you were rich, Winifred!—and this was another reason which led me to beware how I acted a part which might incur even the slightest chance of seeming selfish and egotistical. I do not know, Winifred, whether I have rendered my explanations sufficiently clear—whether you, my dear young friend, can appreciate all those little details of feeling which I have endeavoured to describe—”

“Mr. Dalham,” said Winifred, in a low voice, which was however of silvery clearness—and her head was bent down so that her cheek rested upon the hand which lay on his arm,—“if anything had been wanting to convince me of the magnanimity of your disposition, it would now be supplied by the explanations you have given me! Ever thoughtful and considerate with regard to my interests have you been!—what delicacy has mingled with the generosity of your conduct! But I can say no more! Do you, Mr. Dalham—do you,” she tremulously asked, “wish to say anything more to me?”

“Winifred, if I dared—Oh! if I dared,” he exclaimed—“But no! the same motives as before—”

“Mr. Dalham,” she interjected, “listen to me—and grant me a boon, I beseech you!”

“Anything, Winifred!—everything!” cried Roderick enthusiastically. “You once told me that you would lay down your life for my sake; and that was in the truthful fervour of the noblest gratitude! Believe me, Winifred, it is in no idle spirit of romance that I also proclaim my readiness to lay down my life for *your* sake! And now speak!—what favour can you require of me? what can I possibly do to serve you?”

“Let us separate now,” said Winifred: “let us separate without the interchange of another word except that of *Farewell*:—but let this separation be short! Let us meet again on the third day hence—at this very hour—but let it be in Aldersgate Street, at my own lodgings. Do you agree? will you consent?—and Oh! will you pardon me if in this particular instance I may seem for a moment to assume a spirit of dictation?”

“Yes, Winifred—you shall dictate to me!” answered Roderick Dalham; “and so far from offending me by such dictation, it shall by me be regarded as a proof of the friendship you entertain for me—the confidence you place in me—and the frankness of that intimacy which exists between us. You ask me, Winifred, whether I will do your bidding in a certain respect?—and I answer Yes. Therefore, my young friend, precisely at the hour of noon, on the 17th instant, will I be with you at your abode in Aldersgate Street: and now in obedience to your other injunction I simply add the word *Farewell*!”

Roderick Dalham pressed Winifred’s hand to his lips; and then hurried away in one direction, while the damsel continued her own path towards Sidney Villa. Her summons at the front door was answered by the kind-hearted Rachel, who was always glad to see Miss Barrington; and in

response to the inquiry whether Miss Evelyn was at home, an affirmative was given. Winifred was conducted into the little boudoir, where Agnes putting aside her embroidery, rose to give her a cordial greeting. The beautiful Miss Evelyn was looking exceedingly well; and as usual, the costume that she wore was characterized by a tasteful simplicity which was elegance itself. Her hair, of auburn, or light burnished gold, was floating in ringlets upon her beautifully sculptured shoulders; and her large blue eyes, habitually soft in their expression almost to melancholy, beamed sentiments of the kindest interest and friendship as she proffered her hand to Winifred Barrington.

“Pray be seated,” said the amiable Agnes. “Come as near the fire as possible; the weather is bitterly cold—the snow is again falling! Are your feet wet?”

“No, Miss Evelyn,” replied Winifred. “I rode from the City as far as the Regent’s Park; and then the distance was but short to your dwelling.”

“And now tell me, Miss Barrington, how do all the affairs progress? It is a fortnight since I last saw you; and then you were in great hopes of bringing matters to a speedy settlement so far as your venerable grandaunt’s incarceration is concerned. Tell me, then—for you know the deep interest I experience in all that concerns you,—tell me, is there a chance of that hope being speedily realized?”

“I believe so, Miss Evelyn—I think so—God grant that it may be so!” exclaimed Winifred, speaking the last words with passionate utterance. “There is but one impediment—and to be brief, it is to consult you, Miss Evelyn—or rather to invoke your kind aid—that I am now here!”

“My aid?” exclaimed Agnes. “Oh! you know, Miss Barrington, that if it be indeed possible for me to render you any assistance, I shall do so with the utmost willingness!”

“I knew that I should not appeal to you in vain,” rejoined Winifred. “Will you grant me your patience while I give you some little explanations?—and will you also forgive me, my dear Miss Evelyn, if I am compelled to make certain little allusions to a deceased relative of your’s?”

“Whom do you mean?” asked Agnes. “But methinks I understand! You must doubtless mean my grandfather Mr. Waldron, who was for a while your grandfather’s solicitor?”

“Yes, Miss Evelyn,” responded Winifred: “I allude to Mr. Waldron. I regret to say that the investigation which has during the last two or three months been instituted into my unfortunate grandfather’s affairs—But I am sure that you will forgive me for what I am about to say, because so far from being capable of wilfully—”

“Oh, Miss Barrington!” exclaimed Agnes, “such an assurance is quite unnecessary from your lips! Proceed—speak frankly and candidly: you cannot give me offence, although perhaps you may distress me if I should be compelled to listen to aught derogatory to the repute and character of my deceased grandfather, Mr. Waldron! Yet proceed, Miss Barrington—proceed! I am already prepared to hear that my grandfather dealt not altogether correctly with your grandaunt.”

“Alas, such was the case, Miss Evelyn!” rejoined Winifred. “You know that some time

back my grandfather's affairs were taken out of the hands of Mr. Timperley; and under the auspices of Mr. Wardour, were placed in those of the eminent firm of Cartwright and Co."

"Yes—you told me of these facts," said Agnes,—"and likewise of the handsome sum of between fourteen and fifteen thousand pounds which you had lodged in the Bank of England to be in readiness at any moment to effect your grandfather's emancipation."

"And I have also at different times told you, Miss Evelyn," said Winifred, "that the Chancery suit of *Barrington versus Dalham* has lasted longer than my grandfather's imprisonment, and that it was not always very clear whether the latter had been actually brought about by the former. Now mark!—for upwards of thirty years has that lawsuit lasted: for upwards of five-and-twenty years has my grandfather been a captive in Whitecross Street Prison! The truth is, Miss Evelyn, that by dint of the most searching and laborious investigations conducted by Mr. Wardour and Mr. Cartwright, it has transpired that a network of difficulties and embarrassments, chicaneries—and—sod—excuse me, dear Miss Evelyn—but Mr. Wardour and Mr. Cartwright make use of a very strong term—something worse than duplicities—"

"Speak it freely," said Agnes. "In a matter of this kind there must be no hesitation. Perhaps—perhaps—those legal gentlemen say wickednesses—knaveries—or villainies—"

"Well, Miss Evelyn, it is some harsh term of the kind," said Winifred, generously anxious to avoid the necessity of becoming more explicit.

"And that network of wickednesses," said Agnes, in a voice trembling with emotion,—"was it really commenced by my grandfather? Ah! your looks tell me that it was!—and Oh, I am deeply distressed!"

The tears were trickling down the cheeks of the amiable Agnes: Winifred could not endure the spectacle—she sprang forward—she threw her arms round the neck of our heroine, exclaiming, "Weep not, Miss Evelyn! Good heavens! You have no reason either to distress or blame yourself: for God knows that you are innocent of wrongdoing or offence against every living creature! Besides, my dear Miss Evelyn, for whatsoever amount of injury your grandfather may have inflicted on my family, there has been the amplest atonement in all the goodness and kindness which you have testified towards me!"

"This is a most generous assurance on your part, Miss Barrington," said Agnes, wiping away her tears; "and believe me—Oh, believe me, that if there be now any way in which I can serve you, you shall judge by my zeal whether in my own person I am not anxious to make towards you every atonement for the misdeeds of a progenitor of mine towards an aged relative of your's!"

"Suffer me to continue my explanations," said Winifred; "and then you will comprehend, my dear Miss Evelyn, how you will be enabled to serve me. Thirty years ago your grandaunt Mr. Waldron became solicitor to my grandfather, and began to conduct the memorable lawsuit against Sir John Dalham. My grandfather's affairs became embarrassed—not on account of the lawsuit—but for other reasons—perhaps extravagance on

his part being one of the principal causes. However, such was the fact; and he naturally consulted his solicitor in respect to the means of extricating himself. Then Mr. Waldron, for some purpose relative to which we will not pause to offer a conjecture, began to wind the toils of the law gradually and gradually around my unfortunate grandaunt—aggravating difficulties instead of mitigating them—complicating all that was simple—and multiplying the sources of embarrassment instead of diminishing them. It was the same, Miss Evelyn, as if I were to take this reel of cotton, which is so easy to unwind, and instead of unwinding it at your bidding in a proper and simple matter, were to wilfully and purposely entangle it all in a skein of inextricable confusion. Thus acted Mr. Waldron. The consequence was that my grandfather was arrested and put into gaol five-and-twenty years ago, all his property being swept away under warrants-of-attorney, bills of sale, executions—In short, Miss Evelyn, I cannot now recollect all the legal technicalities—"

"Alas!" said Agnes, "apart from all that legal verbiage, the fact is only too sternly patent to your view, that your unfortunate grandaunt was sacrificed either by the ignorance or the wickedness of mine!"

"Oh! Miss Evelyn," said Winifred, "there seems to be no doubt—there is really no doubt," she emphatically added, "that all this arose from the wickedness and not from the ignorance of Mr. Waldron. It was wickedness wilful and intentional!—indeed it has become only too clear that my unfortunate grandfather was ruined by his own solicitor. And then at Mr. Waldron's death, Mr. Timperley became my grandfather's attorney; and he followed in the same course, perpetuating the same work which his predecessor had so fatally initiated—rendering the skein more complicated—tightening the Gordian knot of difficulties! And this has been going on—this fatal terrible work for five-and-twenty years!—seven years, or thereabouts, in the time of Mr. Waldron—and nearly eighteen years with Mr. Timperley! In short, Miss Evelyn, my grandfather's attorneys, who should have proved his best friends, have been his most deadly enemies; for he has not merely been detained in prison upon deeds that could never be made good, or upon others which have ceased to have effect, or upon others again which were easy of settlement—but every manœuvre has been adopted, every chicanery put into force, every possible intrigue brought into requisition, to delay the progress of his lawsuit. Now, can you comprehend, Miss Evelyn, how it is that Mr. Wardour and Mr. Cartwright, in unravelling this complicated skein, have discovered and pronounced it to be a web of wickednesses—and—end—"

"Villanies!" exclaimed Agnes indignantly; "for such indeed they are! But tell me, my dear Miss Barrington, how is it that your grandfather never looked into his affairs—that he never suspected he was thus rendered a victim and a dupe by those who ought to have protected instead of oppressed, and have sought to raise him up rather than adopt measures to crush him more effectually?"

"Oh! it would seem, from all that can now be possibly ascertained," replied Winifred, "that at

first my grandfather was reckless and indifferent relative to his affairs, as well as ignorant and helpless as a child in business-matters—dependent likewise upon his attorneys not merely to conduct the lawsuit, but also to afford him the means of living:—then, as he grew older and began to look into his affairs, he became infatuated in the confidence which he put in Mr. Timperley;—and thus in one way or another, my dear Miss Evelyn, he has from the first been rendered an easy dupe to those who for their own purposes made him a victim of their designs."

"Oh, this is indeed a dreadful tale to tell and to listen to!" exclaimed Agnes, whose noble nature was shocked, and every generous chord in her heart quivered and vibrated as she heard the narrative and thought of the poor old man who had suffered so terribly. "But what purpose could my grandsire or his successor Mr. Timperley have to serve," inquired Agnes, "in the perpetration of such dreadful wickedness as this?"

"One conjecture—and one conjecture only, Miss Evelyn," rejoined Winifred, "can serve as the solution of this mystery. It is that Sir John Dalham's gold has proved the talisman—"

"Ah, I comprehend!" said Agnes. "Sir John Dalham, being the defendant in that lawsuit—"

"And knowing that his cause was bad," interjected Winifred,—"certain that if it were left to the common course of justice, it must utterly fail, and that my grandfather's rights must be made apparent,—Sir John Dalham had recourse to all these vile and dreadful means to prolong the suit—to keep my grandfather in prison—to crush his spirit with delays—to break his heart with disappointment! Oh, Miss Evelyn! it is a frightful tale of iniquity which I am thus unravelling to your comprehension; and you know not how distressed I am at being compelled to associate therewith the name of your grandsire!"

"It is kind of you to speak thus, my dear Winifred," said Agnes; "for, Oh! if you were to hate me as the descendant of one who has proved so bitter a foe to your own revered relative—"

"If I were to hate you, Miss Evelyn," rejoined Winifred, "I should be capable of hating an angel from heaven; and God be thanked I have no capacity for such wickedness!"

"Tell me how I can serve you!—Oh, tell me how I can serve you!" exclaimed Agnes: "what can I do to help in the disentanglement of this fearful skein? Is it money? You shall have all I can command—raise—borrow—or obtain—"

"No, dear Miss Evelyn—it is not money that is required," replied Winifred; "for I am possessed of ample funds to effect my grandfather's liberation. But I must demand your patience yet a little while—and then you will see how you can serve me. The first grand object which I have now in view, is to emancipate my grandfather from prison: the second will be to bring the cause on for hearing before the Lord Chancellor with the least possible delay. The two matters are however perfectly distinct. In respect to the former everything is arranged—everything is settled, with this exception,—that Mr. Timperley holds a document which has the effect of neutralizing all the other arrangements unless it be given up into our hands. That document is of no real

use to Mr. Timperley as a security: in this sense it is valueless. The only thing is that by using it as a means of coercion against my grandsire, Mr. Timperley may possibly obtain recompenses from Sir John Dalham—always supposing that the conjecture is the right one, and that Sir John Dalham is the principal motive power in all this complicated wickedness."

"And Mr. Timperley has a deed, you say," observed Agnes, "which for legitimate purposes is of no use to him, but which on the other hand is of vital importance to the furtherance of your grandfather's interests?"

"That is precisely the position in which the matter stands," answered Winifred. "But I must further tell you, Miss Evelyn, that we are not quite so much in Mr. Timperley's power as from what I have been saying you might conceive. There is a law process by which Mr. Timperley might be compelled to give up the deed, or else to show good and proper cause why he retains it. We might adopt this hostile course towards him. But in the first place it would cause a considerable delay in the emancipation of my grandfather; and in the second place," added Winifred, with a look and tone of tenderest friendship, "it would lead to consequences most disagreeable to your feelings, my dear Miss Evelyn, inasmuch as it would necessitate a total exposure of the whole transactions of which my grandfather has been rendered the victim!—it would drag forth the name of Mr. Waldron from the oblivion of the tomb and would cover his memory with degradation and infamy!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Agnes; "then now I comprehend, my dear Winifred, that your motive in coming to me has been not merely to seek my assistance, but rather to confer a most delicate favour on myself, and to spare me the pain of beholding the memory of my grandsire thus dragged infamously to the light of the present day. Oh, I thank you, Miss Barrington! And now tell me, what am I to do in this matter? Has application been made to Mr. Timperley for the deed?"

"Yes," replied Winifred; "and Mr. Timperley has made a dozen different excuses. In a word, Mr. Wardour and Mr. Cartwright were desirous of taking immediate measures against Mr. Timperley: but I begged them to delay the matter yet a little while, until I should have spoken to you. For I will tell you what I thought, Miss Evelyn—"

"What did you think, my dear friend?" asked Agnes.

"I happen to know that you are very intimate—or at least that you used to be, with Mr. Timperley's niece—Miss Cicely Neale who was—now the Hon. Mrs. Hardress: while the Hon. Mrs. Hardress herself is said to wield great influence over her uncle and aunt, for they gave her a dower of some thirty or forty thousand pounds. I believe that all these are facts, Miss Evelyn?"

"Yes—everything you state is I believe perfectly consistent with the truth," said Agnes. "The Hon. Mrs. Hardress occasionally visits me here; but I never go to her house. I fear, Winifred, you may think that I am making use of a subterfuge in order to avoid any interference with the matter in question; and therefore I must tell you that some months ago the Hon. Mr. Hardress behaved most insultingly to me—"

"Not for a single instant, my dear Miss Evelyn," exclaimed Winifred, "could I deem you capable of subterfuge or duplicity. But in respect to the Hon. Mr. Hardress I can positively inform you that he is not at this moment in London: for when thinking of all these matters yesterday, I took up a newspaper at Mr. Wardour's office, my eye glanced at the name of Hardress—and I then read amongst the Fashionable Intelligence that he had set out with two or three young noblemen on an excursion to Paris; while the same paragraph stated that the Hon. Mrs. Hardress remained at her beautiful villa-residence at Bayswater."

"You are therefore sure, Winifred," said Agnes, "that the Hon. Hector Hardress is not in London?"

"If the newspaper paragraph can be relied upon," rejoined Winifred; "and I feel confident that it is correct."

"Then in that case," said Miss Evelyn, "I will at once proceed to Bayswater and see Cicely on this important subject. Have you a description of the deed to which such special reference is made?"

"Yes," answered Winifred: "here are the particulars:"—and she produced a slip of paper which she handed to Agnes.

A cab was sent for: Agnes took Winifred as far as the New Road: there they separated—and our heroine proceeded to Bayswater.

CHAPTER LV.

THE DEED.

It was between one and two o'clock in the afternoon—and Cicely was lounging in a voluptuous easy chair, in an elegantly furnished apartment at the villa at Bayswater. She was partaking of breakfast, for she had been up all night at a brilliant entertainment given by her husband's parents Lord and Lady Mendlesham, whose countenance she had continued to enjoy ever since she had extorted this concession as a reward for saving the honour of her sister-in-law the Hon. Josephine Hardress.

Cicely, having been in bed for some hours after returning from the entertainment, had at length risen; and she now looked not as if she had been dissipating, so to speak, for the greater portion of the night: there was a healthy freshness in her appearance—a bloom upon the skin,—which set off her beautiful complexion with the most brilliant effect. The reader will scarcely require to be reminded that she was tall and good-looking, without being absolutely beautiful or handsome. She was robustly formed, with full rich contours, voluptuously luxuriant, and yet not bordering upon *embonpoint*. Her large blue eyes denoted a certain soft sensuousness, but sufficiently refined to be mistaken for a sentimental peneiveness. Her lips were very full, and as pouting as they could be without being absolutely coarse; and they were ever habitually held slightly apart, displaying a magnificent set of teeth. Her limbs were admirably modelled—her arms robustly rounded—the feet and ankles of a perfect symmetry. She was now dressed in a morning *negligée*; and as

she lay half reclining in her easy chair—her fine form sustained by the flocculent velvet cushions—one half-naked arm disclosed as she listlessly played with the luxuriant tresses of her light hair—there was an indescribable air of fascination and voluptuousness about this lady; and it might even be said of her that she was quite capable of wielding over certain hearts a power and influence which many a woman of a more exquisite beauty would fail to exercise.

We have already said that the room was elegantly furnished; and it exhibited the prevalence of a perfect feminine taste. The statues holding wax tapers—the mantel-ornaments—the draperies—the china breakfast service—all testified to the same effect: while a beautiful little lapdog was no uninteresting addition to the entire scene.

The Hon. Mrs. Hardress was thus lounging in her easy chair, when Miss Evelyn was announced. As the reader is aware, this was the first time that Agnes had ever called at the villa at Bayswater; and Cicely was therefore somewhat astonished on beholding her friend—for she cherished a real liking towards our amiable and beautiful heroine. It was therefore a kind welcome which Agnes experienced; and Cicely waited with some degree of interest and suspense until the object of this visit should be explained—though she was of course too polite to put the question.

"I am rejoiced to see you, my dear Agnes," said Cicely. "I was thinking of you just now; and it is most probable that if you had not thus called upon me, I should have presented myself at Sidney Villa in the course of the afternoon. Have you heard, my dear friend, of your cousin Floribel lately?"

"I have heard nothing more of her," replied Agnes, with a saddened look and voice, "since Mr. De Vere wrote about two months back—I read you that portion of his letter, you remember——"

"Yes," said Cicely; "in which Mr. De Vere informed you that Floribel had separated from Mr. Clifford—that she purposed to take another name—and dwell altogether on the Continent in some strict seclusion. Yes—it must be two months since the date of that letter! And that is the last intelligence you have received of your cousin Floribel?"

"The last," rejoined Agnes. "Mr. De Vere has heard nothing of her since."

"And Mrs. Vere, whom I met one day at your house, and who seemed to be a very nice lady,—has she gone out to join her son at Naples?" asked Cicely.

"Oh, yes," replied Agnes: "Mrs. De Vere left England about three weeks ago. I have since received a letter from her, notifying her safe arrival at Naples. The letter came to England in the British Ambassador's bag; and hence the speed with which it has reached me. And now to speak of yourself for a moment, Cicely,—you are looking exceedingly well. But why so late at breakfast?"

"Because, my dear Agnes, I was up till half-past five o'clock this morning at a brilliant entertainment given by Lord and Lady Mendlesham. They were very much annoyed that Hardress would not wait for it; but he had made all his arrangements to go to Paris——"

"Yes," said Agnes; "I learnt through the mo-



dizim of the newspaper that the Hon. Mr. Herd-
 rease had gone upon the Continent. And now,
 my dear Cicely, I will touch upon the business
 which has brought me hither—for this is really a
 business visit!"

"Indeed! business?" exclaimed Cicely, with a
 smile.

"Yes—it is a great favour that I have to ask
 of you," continued Agnes; "but I feel confident
 that you will do your best to grant it. You re-
 member Winifred Barrington?"

"Most assuredly," responded Mrs. Hardress—
 and it was a sort of start that she gave when the
 name was mentioned. "How can I forget any-
 thing connected with that horrible murder? But
 why do you ask me?"

"You know the interest which I took in that
 poor girl——"

"Did I not accompany you to the police-
 office?"

No. 12.—AGNES.

"Yes—I remember!" exclaimed Agnes; "and
 you were not as strongly convinced as I was of
 poor Winifred's innocence."

"But I am now—I have been ever since the
 trial—indeed perhaps even before it! But what
 of this Winifred? Ah! I recollect that I heard
 my uncle Mr. Timperley complaining bitterly some
 time ago, of the affairs of Winifred's grandfather,
 Mr. Barrington, being taken out of his hands.
 He was excessively angry——"

"I hope that he is not so exceedingly angry
 still," said Agnes; "for it is precisely in reference
 to these affairs of Mr. Barrington, and of Mr.
 Timperley, that I am about to speak."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Cicely. "And what can
 this business be?"

"I will tell you, my dear Cicely: but the
 matter is to be as much a secret as possible be-
 tween you and me. You know that your uncle
 Mr. Timperley succeeded my grandfather Mr.

Waldron? With mingled shame and sorrow am I constrained to confess that it was my grandfather Mr. Waldron who initiated the ruin of Mr. Barrington."

"Oh! doubtless," exclaimed Cicely, "all clients attribute their ruin to their lawyers!"—and as she thus spoke her musical laugh rang merrily through the room, while her taper fingers went on playing listlessly with the tresses of her light luxuriant hair.

"I am sorry to say, Cicely," resumed Miss Evelyn, gravely, "that my grandfather had a direct and positive share in the persecution and the ruin of that poor old man; and I, granddaughter of the one, wish to make atonement from family to family, by rendering a service that is sought of me by the granddaughter of the other! Pray, dear Cicely, do not turn all this into ridicule—nor laugh at it—nor think that I am attaching too much importance to something which has been told me——"

"My dear Agnes," replied Mrs. Hardress, "I will treat the matter as seriously as you yourself are treating it. You know my readiness to serve you: tell me how this may be done, and trust to my good offices to accomplish your behest."

"Oh, this is kind of you, Cicely!" exclaimed Agnes: "but it is only what I expected from your friendship. Listen, then! All arrangements are made for the liberation of old Mr. Barrington, with the exception of one detail; and that is explained by this paper."

Agnes produced the slip which she had received from Winifred; and Cicely, glancing over its contents, said, "It is some deed which appears to be in my uncle Mr. Timperley's possession."

"And it is precisely that deed which is now required to effect the poor old man's deliverance. May I trust to you, Cicely?—dare I entreat of you?"

"If the deed be worth anything," interjected the Hon. Mrs. Hardress, "my uncle is not exactly the right sort of person to give up a security without an adequate consideration?"

"I am assured," said Agnes, "that it is worth nothing to him in a proper and legitimate way."

"Then, if this be really the case," said Mrs. Hardress,—"and since it is to oblige you, my dear Agnes, I promise to fulfil your demand. Yes—you may consider it to be as good as done! When once I pledge myself to such an extent, I allow no difficulty to stand in the way—no obstacle to oppose my will. I will go and see Mr. Timperley this very afternoon; and perhaps this evening—or perhaps to-morrow morning—the deed shall be in your possession."

Agnes expressed her liveliest gratitude to the Hon. Mrs. Hardress for this assurance; and after a little more conversation our heroine took her departure. Cicely then ordered her carriage, and set off to visit her relatives in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

On arriving there, Cicely learnt that her aunt Mrs. Timperley had gone out to pay a round of visits and was not expected home for a couple of hours: but Mr. Timperley was in his office, and disengaged at the moment. To that private office did the Hon. Mrs. Hardress accordingly proceed; and on making her appearance she greeted her niece just as if she entertained the utmost respect

and affection for him—while he on his part pretended to be very glad to see her; for this was the sort of demeanour, which, as it were by tacit consent, they had respectively agreed to adopt towards each other. Cicely sat down; and the lawyer was about to consign some documents back to the particular place from which they had been taken, when Cicely's quick eye caught sight of the endorsement upon the packet; and she said with a significant look, "Ah! the affair of Morton Evelyn and the Ormsby Peerage?"

"Yes, Cicely," answered the lawyer, with a peculiarly knowing expression of countenance: "Morton Evelyn and the Ormsby Peerage affair. I have this very day received a piece of information—it is of the most extraordinary character—but more extraordinary, I fear, than useful——"

"That is a singular expression, my dear uncle," said Cicely. "What do you mean? Surely to one who at a certain period of his life took so much interest in this affair, any piece of intelligence which at all bears thereupon must be of more or less utility?"

"Not necessarily so," answered Mr. Timperley. "But I do not think, Cicely, that you either know enough of the matter, or care sufficiently about it to be at all interested——"

"On the contrary," said the Hon. Mrs. Hardress: "I know the whole story—at least so far as you one day chose to make me acquainted with it, when certain circumstances transpired to impart a special interest to the affair in my estimation, although so many years have elapsed since the romantic events took place——"

"Well, well, Cicely—enough upon that point!" said the lawyer. "Tell me, how is your husband——"

"I beg your pardon, my dear uncle," interjected the Hon. Mrs. Hardress: "let us for a moment revert to the topic on which our attention was fixed. You say that you have received some peculiar information relative to the affair of the Ormsby Peerage, and which information is more singular than useful——"

"If you have any curiosity on the point, my dear Cicely," said the solicitor, "I have no objection to gratify it. There is not a shadow of a secret connected with the business——"

"And even if there were," interrupted Cicely, with a significant look, "you would not keep it secret from me."

Mr. Timperley knit his brows, and appeared for a moment to be both angry and confused; but quickly recovering himself, he said, "I have this day received a piece of information—or rather I should term it, certain documentary evidence, which if it had only transpired some eighteen or nineteen years ago, would have materially altered the current of many events——"

"Indeed?" said Cicely. "But what, my dear uncle, may this documentary evidence be?"

"Since you have told me that you are acquainted with the entire narrative of the past," resumed Mr. Timperley, "I need scarcely remind you that a certain Mr. Morton Evelyn——"

"Was supposed for the moment to be Lord Ormsby—was made to believe that he was," said Cicely,—"was duped and deceived——"

"Well, well," interrupted Mr. Timperley, "there is no use in entering into elaborate details; for

you know, Cicely—though the world generally does not know—that Mr. Waldron never for a moment believed Morton Evelyn to be the veritable heir to the Ormsby peerage and property. But should you not be surprised, Cicely, if you were to learn that this Morton Evelyn whom Waldron, as you know, put forward as a pretender—

"Surely," ejaculated Mrs. Hardress, with increasing interest and astonishment, "you are not going to tell me that Morton Evelyn was after all—"

"The rightful heir, Cicely!—as sure as you are sitting there!" responded Mr. Timperley. "Yes—he was the real and true Lord Ormsby after all!"

"Good heavens! this is marvellous!" cried the lady. "Then Agnes is the heiress to the wealth, at least, if not to the title—"

"Stop, stop, my dear Cicely! be not so fast!" said the lawyer. "There are numberless considerations in this business: and I was plunged in the midst of them at the moment when you entered my office. First, however, in respect to Morton Evelyn, it is actually and positively the case that he was the veritable heir to the Ormsby peerage and property. After all, it is scarcely any wonder if the late Joshua Waldron when casting his line into a lake swarming with Evelyns, should at last have hooked up a particular fish—"

"But it is nevertheless wonderful," observed Cicely, "that the particular Evelyn whom he put forward as a pretender, should turn out to be the rightful claimant to the title and wealth of Ormsby!"

"Yes—that is singular enough," said Mr. Timperley. "Morton Evelyn could never trace back his pedigree farther than Andrew Evelyn, his grand-sire; and thus it became impossible to connect that Andrew Evelyn with the Evelyns of the Ormsby race. Indeed, Waldron was never serious in entertaining the belief that any such connexion could possibly be established. But now the fact is brought to light—it is elucidated—"

"And everything which upwards of eighteen years back Mr. Waldron sought to establish by means of forged deeds and documents,—everything, I say," continued Cicely, "was actually and positively correct?—and there was no fraud after all except in the means by which it was endeavoured to substantiate the truth?"

"It is all just as you say, Cicely," rejoined Mr. Timperley; "and therefore you comprehend what I meant when I just now said that if the evidence which I have this day received should have only turned up some eighteen years ago, it would have given a far different impulse to many important events. Morton Evelyn would not have run away, never to be heard of any more—Joshua Waldron would not have committed suicide—his daughter Honoris would not have died of a broken heart—and Agnes would not have been an orphan in her infancy."

"All would indeed have been very different!" said Cicely, musing. "But if I mistake not," she resumed, at the expiration of a few moments, "the property is immense,—consisting of ready money and estates—"

"Yes," said Mr. Timperley; "there are estates in Wiltshire, producing upwards of six thousand

a-year: they have long ago reverted to the Crown—but they could easily be recovered from the Government if an heir were to make his appearance."

"His appearance?" said Cicely. "Ah! then, I understand!—the estates were all vested in the heirs male; and therefore poor Agnes cannot assert her claim. Ah! but the ready money that was in the Bank of England, or the Sinking Fund, or whatever you call it,—does not that amount to two hundred thousand pounds?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Timperley. "But—"

"But?" ejaculated Cicely: "is there indeed a but in this case?—cannot Agnes claim the ready money?"

"She might—yes, she *might*," answered the lawyer, slowly and deliberately. "It is upon all this that I have been thinking. But she must not claim it, Cicely!—and therefore it is unnecessary to excite any hope in her mind—"

"And why must she not claim it?" inquired Mrs. Hardress.

"For several reasons," responded the lawyer. "In the first place she would have to prove that her father, Mr. Morton Evelyn—or Lord Ormsby, as he actually was after all—has ceased to exist. And this she cannot prove; and therefore she would have to bring forward all possible evidence to show that he is not likely to be in existence—or in other words that he disappeared suddenly upwards of eighteen years ago, and has never since been heard of."

"And this," said Cicely, "would surely be held as the best presumptive evidence that Morton Evelyn, as we will call him, is indeed no more?"

"Yes—but it would be necessary to show under what circumstances he disappeared, upwards of eighteen years back," continued Mr. Timperley. "Remember that this is a question of recovering money from the Government; and the Government in such cases never parts with a shilling unless the claim be made good upon positive evidence, or at least the very best presumptive testimony. Let us suppose that Agnes Evelyn were to assert her claim to this two hundred thousand pounds: she would allege her father's disappearance, and the fact that he has never since been heard of, as the proofs of his death. But the Government would ask what reason there was for supposing that he might never reappear upon the theatre of the world?—it would ask to know what circumstances had led to his disappearance? It would then be necessary to revive past events—to repeat a tale which has long since been forgotten—in a word, Cicely," added the lawyer, bending a significant look upon his niece, "it would by no means suit me to recall to men's minds the fact that I was Mr. Waldron's clerk at the period when all those events took place."

Cicely reflected for a few moments; and then she said, "True! you were Mr. Waldron's clerk—but could you not so tell the tale of past events as to separate yourself from all the iniquity thereof?"

"Scarcely so—scarcely so," answered Mr. Timperley, shaking his head. "Look you, Cicely. Eighteen years have elapsed since those events; and during this period I have toiled—I have won riches for myself—and what is more, I have made my name respectable; and people when speaking

of the opulent Mr. Timperley of the present day, do not think of inquiring who he formerly was, or of recollecting everything they may at one time have known about him. Well then, think you that it is worth my while to give an impulse to all such inquiries or to excite all such recollections—to bring my name before the public in connexion with Waldron and Ormsby—”

“And yet, for Agnes Evelyn’s sake,” said Cicely, “you ought to strain a point—”

“Oh! but there are other considerations besides these which I have been mentioning,” said Mr. Timperley, who began to regret that he had made a *confidante* of his niece in the present instance. “Listen! After Waldron’s suicide, following so closely upon Morton Evelyn’s disappearance, surmises arose that there was something wrong in respect to Morton’s assumption of the Ormsby peerage and to the claims he had made upon the property—”

“He never received any of the property?” said Cicely inquiringly.

“Never,” answered Mr. Timperley: “but for a little while he bore the title of Lord Ormsby. As I was saying, however, his sudden disappearance, followed so closely by Waldron’s suicide, gave rise to something more than mere surmise and conjecture; and the Government official called at this office—for it was Waldron’s, you know—to inquire for all the deeds and documents in any way connected with Morton Evelyn’s alleged claims. Of course, my dear Cicely,” added the lawyer, fixing a significant look upon his niece, “I told the Government official that there were no such papers in the office, and that I therefore supposed that Mr. Waldron must have destroyed them before he put a period to his own existence.”

“But all the while you knew where the papers were,” said Cicely; “you had kept them—you had possession of them—you had secreted them?”

“Yes—or else how could they be now in my possession?” asked Mr. Timperley, with a cunning smile. “I scarcely know why I kept them: perhaps I thought that I might some day turn them to a better advantage than Waldron had done;—for you must remember that by his death my own position was rendered a desperate one, and I was ready to do almost anything to obtain a crust: but fortunately I found at that moment a good client—none other than your father-in-law Lord Mendlesham—who required me to transact some little business of rather a delicate character, on his behalf. This affair put me in possession of ready money. I toiled on—I took out an attorney’s certificate—I addressed myself to all Waldron’s old clients—many of them came around me—and thus by degrees I succeeded in making a better business than even he had ever possessed—”

“And therefore,” said Cicely, “you had no need to make use of the Evelyn papers?”

“No: but from time to time I have looked over them—I have examined into their minutest details—I have perused the copious *memoranda* which were the result of Waldron’s long years of research—and I have thought to myself that if ever the real heir of the Ormsby peerage could be found—”

“Well,” interrupted Cicely, “but you have lost the thread of your discourse. You were giving me reasons to show how it is expedient that Agnes

Evelyn should remain in ignorance of this claim which she now has to the sum of two hundred thousand pounds, as well as the prefix of *Honourable* to her name as the daughter of a peer—”

“Yes,” said the lawyer; “I was telling you my reasons. When the Government official called upon me, eighteen years ago, to inquire for the Evelyn papers, I declared that Mr. Waldron must have destroyed them. That same Government official is still alive—I met him the other day—he knows me well. If I were now to produce the papers, he would recollect the former circumstance—it would all tell against me—it would bring my name into disrepute—it would at once convince the world that I was not merely Waldron’s clerk, but likewise his accomplice—In short, Cicely, the whole thing is an affair which I should prefer to leave at rest! It must inevitably do me more harm than good to suffer it to be revived or reopened! There is only one contingency in which the business could now benefit me; and that is pretty nearly an impossibility—”

“What do you mean?” asked Cicely.

“I mean, if Morton Evelyn—or rather Lord Ormsby, as we may call him—should be living—”

“And may not this be possible?”

“No—preposterous! absurd!” ejaculated Mr. Timperley. “Upwards of eighteen years have elapsed since he disappeared, and nothing more was ever heard of him. He was fond of his wife and devotedly attached to his infant. Think you, then, that if he had lived he would have continued indifferent to their fate? No!—rest assured that the unfortunate young man committed suicide, when fleeing from his house on the memorable occasion that he rushed from his drawing-room, almost knocking me down as I was standing upon the threshold contemplating the strange and exciting scene before me! Yes—rest assured, I say, that he committed suicide!—for he was like one demented. Ah, it was a scene which one who gazed upon it never can forget!”

“Let us suppose, then,” said Cicely, “that Morton Evelyn has long been dead,—still, my dear uncle, for the sake of his daughter Agnes—”

“Cicely!” interrupted the lawyer, with sternness, “I have already told you that it suits my interests to leave the matter entirely at rest, rather than in any way to revive it. In plain terms, I don’t want the past to be talked about—”

“But surely, my dear uncle,” urged Cicely, “you could devise some means of putting Agnes in possession of her rights without compromising yourself?”

“I have thought deeply over the subject,” rejoined Mr. Timperley; “and I find that it cannot be done without inconvenience or risk to myself. You seem to have taken a great fancy to Agnes Evelyn all of a sudden?”

“You know that I liked her almost from the very first instant that I was introduced to her,” said Cicely. “But now I will tell you why I have conceived not merely this liking, but I may term it a special affection for Agnes Evelyn. You do not know how long I was acquainted with Hector before we were married: there are certain circumstances of which you are ignorant, and concerning which there is no need that I should be explicit.

Suffice it however to say that Hector made love to Agnes—and she rejected him. From that circumstance arose the duel which was fought between Hector and Charles De Vere. Well, my dear uncle, Agnes refused the overtures of Hector—she was not dazzled by his patrician rank—and now will you tell me whether I ought not to feel myself under an obligation to her who thus left Hector free to become *my* husband?"

"She did not know at the time that she was rendering you this service," said Mr. Timperley.

"No matter," ejaculated Mrs. Hardress,—"no matter whether it were done with any special purpose or not! At all events to *me* the result has been most important. And besides, there are certain persons in the world whom you cannot help liking; and I confess that I have conceived the greatest interest in Agnes Evelyn."

"But you will nevertheless respect the secret which I have communicated to you," said Mr. Timperley. "Recollect," he continued, with a look of sombre significance, "when upwards of three months back you demanded thirty thousand pounds at my hands, you told me that you were intensely selfish—a hypocrite and a dissembler, as well as an astute strategist—that all your sympathies were concentrated in your own egotism—that to achieve your own aggrandizement you would trample upon any other consideration—that you would scruple at no crime so long as you had the certainty of shielding yourself from its consequences——"

"Yes, truly—I recollect," said the Honourable Mrs. Hardress, with the utmost coolness, as with her taper fingers she played with a tress of her long hair, while lounging negligently back in the easy chair in which she was seated; "I have no doubt I spoke to somewhat that effect. And now I presume that you would have me infer that if I am selfish, you also are selfish?"

"And as you would sacrifice everything to your own interests, Cicely," rejoined the lawyer, "I may be permitted to entertain the same views and act after a similar fashion. Therefore let me hear not another syllable on behalf of Agnes Evelyn——"

"Wall, well, my dear uncle," interjected Cicely, "we are not going to dispute upon the point. Ah! you have forgotten to tell me how you obtained that piece of documentary evidence which substantiates the claims of the deceased Morton Evelyn; for deceased we must suppose him to be!"

"The incident is singular enough," answered Mr. Timperley. "I had just entered my office this morning at about ten o'clock, when a very old man—quite an unpolished rustic—called to speak to me. His age is upwards of eighty; but he has a fine hale look, and must possess a vigorous constitution. I asked him what his business was? So he took out an old greasy pocket-book, tied round with what appeared to be a shoe-string; and thence he produced a scrap cut from an old newspaper bearing a date of nineteen years back. He handed it to me; and I saw it was an advertisement inquiring for the baptismal certificate of a certain Andrew Evelyn, and offering a reward of twenty guineas for the production of the same. I asked the old man what his object was in showing me this advertisement. He told

me that happening to stumble over an old newspaper a few days ago, he had sat down to read it from a motive of curiosity, when he saw this advertisement. Now, being the parish-clerk of the village of Broomdale in Warwickshire, he took it into his head to examine the registry: it was first the whim of an idle moment, without the hope that such a search would result in success. Conceive therefore the old man's astonishment when he discovered the very certificate specified in the advertisement! He took a copy of it; and having some little business to transact in London, he thought he might just as well call at this office to see if by any chance the certificate were *now* of any use. Having told me this tale, the old man produced the certificate: I glanced at it, and at once saw that it filled up the gap which Waldren had not been able to surmount except by means of fraud and forgery. It however immediately struck me that the affair must now be dealt cautiously with. I therefore assured the old clerk that the certificate had for years ceased to be of the slightest use—that I would however keep it since he had been kind enough to bring it—and that I would give him five guineas as a reward for his good intentions. He went away delighted; and I retained possession of the certificate."

"The incident is a singular one," observed Cicely. "But now, my dear uncle, as we have discoursed upon this topic long enough, I will beg to turn your attention to another, for I have yet to explain the particular motive which led me to call upon you this afternoon."

"And what is that motive, my dear niece?" asked Mr. Timperley.

"I just now received a visit from the very young lady of whom we have been speaking—I mean Agnes Evelyn. You know that she took a great interest in the affairs of Winifred Barrington——"

"Wall, wall," said Mr. Timperley, now fidgeting nervously with the piles of documents which lay before him upon the desk; "I hope, my dear Cicely, I am not going to hear any long story upon this topic?"

"It will be a short one if you do not interrupt me," replied the Hon. Mrs. Hardress. "All arrangements are made for the liberation of old Mr. Barrington——"

"Ah! I knew what they were working at!" ejaculated the lawyer, with a malignant gleaming in his eyes. "They have applied to me for a certain document—but I will not give it up. No, no!—so long as I hold possession of that deed——"

"But you will not hold possession of it any longer, my dear uncle," said Cicely, with an affable smile and yet with a peremptory tone. "It will only get you into trouble, I can assure you; and you who are so afraid of suffering in reputation on account of the Morton Evelyn affair of bygone years, are now with a strange fatuity rushing headlong into the vortex of disgrace in the affair of these Barringtons——"

"Not so, my dear Cicely: I know what I am about," interrupted the lawyer. "You cannot penetrate into these mysteries——"

"I know this much, uncle," she exclaimed,—"that the deed to which I refer is utterly useless to yourself in a legitimate point of view—you can

never recover any money upon it—while on the other hand it serves in some way or another to detain that poor old man in prison.”

“And think you not, my dear girl,” cried Mr. Timperley, “that I find it to my account to pursue this policy?”

“I have no doubt you are paid from some quarter or another,” rejoined Cicely; “but all this is a very dangerous game which you are playing. Believe me, my dear uncle——”

“Enough, Cicely! I understand my own business best,” ejaculated the lawyer. “I will not be dictated to—I will not be coerced——”

“Excuse me, my dear uncle,” said Cicely, still with a smiling countenance, and yet with firmness of tone; “but you will have the kindness to give me up that deed, of which this is a description:”—and she produced the slip of paper which she had received from our heroine.

“Cicely, you are mad!” exclaimed the lawyer; “coming to dictate to me in such a fashion! What earthly interest have you——”

“I wish to oblige Miss Evelyn—who in her turn is anxious to oblige Miss Barrington. Now, my dear uncle, without another syllable of parley,” continued Mrs. Hardress, “give me up that deed. It is useless to hesitate: give it me, I say!”

“And if I refuse, Cicely?” said the lawyer, looking anxiously and deprecatingly in her countenance.

She bent forward—gazed steadfastly upon him—and said in a low decisive tone, “You dare not refuse!”

Mr. Timperley’s pale face now became absolutely ghastly: his ashy lips quivered as if he were about to say something; but the next instant he bit them as if to still their agitation, and perhaps to keep back the angry words that were ready to burst forth. He rose from his seat: he was about to turn towards a large japan-box bearing the name of “BARRINGTON” painted upon it, when suddenly bethinking himself of something, he muttered, “Ah! I recollect! I was looking over the deed just now—it is here somewhere amongst these papers.”

But Mr. Timperley was so nervous and agitated, and his hands trembled to such a degree, that instead of singling out the particular deed he required from amidst the number of documents upon his desk, he only seemed as if he were rendering the confusion worse confounded. He jumbled and tumbled them all together—he appeared as if he had lost his head: the last words which Cicely had spoken seemed to have filled his soul with dismay.

“My dear uncle,” said Cicely, “you will put all your papers into the most inextricable confusion! Look—is not this the one which I require? It seems to bear an endorsement corresponding with the words written on that little slip of paper?”

“Yes, yes—it is the deed you require,” answered the lawyer, in a tremulous voice. “Take it, Cicely—take it. But how often do you mean to use this power——”

“Do not be afraid that I shall play the tyrant towards you,” interrupted Cicely. “In the present instance I am obliging my friend Agnes Evelyn; and I am enabling you, uncle, to show a favour unto Winifred Barrington.”

“Well, well, Cicely—take the deed! take the

deed!” cried Mr. Timperley, who was shaking and quivering as if smitten with the palsy. “Here! take it, my dear girl—take it! But pray keep silent in respect to the secret which you have this day learnt relative to the Evelyn affairs!”

“Fear nothing,” replied Mrs. Hardress; “you know very well that I should not travel out of my way to injure you, nor to do aught that might endanger your reputation.”

Cicely then took her leave of her uncle, and hastened forth to her carriage, concealing beneath her rich Cashmere shawl the deed which Mr. Timperley with nervous hand had hastily enveloped in a sheet of paper ere he consigned it into her possession. But as the door closed upon that individual, he threw himself back in his seat, and pressed his hands to his throbbing brows, murmuring, “She-devil that she is!—maledictions upon the day which placed me in her power!”

A few minutes afterwards Mr. Timperley endeavoured to apply himself to whatsoever business next demanded his attention: but he found that he could not settle his mind to such a degree. His thoughts were agitated—his nerves were unstrung: he felt the necessity of fresh air. He accordingly locked up his own private room, leaving all the deeds and documents lying as they were upon the table; and he sallied forth to woo the icy breeze to his feverishly throbbing brows.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE QUADROON WIFE.

THE Hon. Mrs. Hardress, on re-entering her carriage, ordered it to drive to Sidney Villa at St. John’s Wood. She had a splendid pair of horses belonging to her equipage: the distance was soon accomplished—and it was about five o’clock as Cicely reached Miss Evelyn’s abode.

“I have succeeded according to my promise,” she said, the moment she entered the drawing-room to which Rachel conducted her. “Here, my dear Agnes, is the deed you require!—and now let me hope there will be no barrier to the emancipation of poor old Mr. Barrington?”

“Oh, Cicely!” exclaimed Agnes, “this is indeed most kind of you! You know not what happiness your generosity will have the effect of instilling into the soul of poor Winifred! But tell me, did you experience much difficulty with Mr. Timperley——”

“Yes, Agnes—the work was not accomplished without some little degree of entreaty and persuasion. However, there is the document;—and now the only return I ask for the little service I have thus rendered, is that through Winifred’s intervention in respect to her grandpère’s affairs, the name of Mr. Timperley may be mentioned with as little acerbity as possible: for remember, Agnes, he is my uncle—and unfortunately in this world the evil repute of an individual redounds more or less on the heads of all his relatives and connexions.”

“I understand,” said Agnes; “and rest assured, my dear Cicely, that from your generous conduct no unpleasant effects shall redound upon your own head!”

Cicely soon took her leave: and when Agnes was again alone, she opened the envelope of the packet which had been left with her, in order to assure herself that it was the actual deed which Winifred required, and that no mistake had been committed. She saw by the endorsement that it was the very one; and she was about to envelope the document again in the white paper, when she perceived that something had fallen upon the carpet. This was a small slip; and Agnes, picking it up, replaced it in the middle of the deed without doing more than glancing her eyes along the uppermost line of its contents; so that the only words which she happened to catch were these—"Broomdale, Warwickshire." She had no undue curiosity: she was incapable of prying into the affairs of others; and thus she read not a single line of the deed itself beyond the endorsement; while of this separate slip of paper to which we have alluded, she caught but these two single words of its contents. She wrapped the document and the slip in the envelope, and consigned the packet to a secure place, with the purpose of taking it to Winifred the very first thing in the morning.

If Agnes had only possessed the slightest share of curiosity, she would have been perhaps led to peruse a slip the contents of which intimately related to herself; and though she might not have comprehended how such a paper could have borne any reference to her own affairs, yet in consequence of falling in with the name of *Evelyn*, she might have been led to make inquiries—and she might then possibly have got upon a clue tending to farther developments. All this is however perfectly hypothetical, and is indeed a useless speculation, for the simple fact that Agnes did not read the paper at all—or at least her eye only accidentally caught the two words which we have recorded, and which seemed not to have any connexion, even the remotest, with herself or her own affairs. But, Oh! if Agnes had known what that slip of paper was—if she could only have conjectured how intimately it regarded her! For perhaps the reader has by this time begun to understand what it was that had happened. Mr. Timperley, in the confusion, hurry, and nervous agitation into which he was plunged when looking for the particular deed that his niece required, had accidentally taken up at the same time the certificate brought him in the morning by the old parish clerk of Broomdale, Warwickshire. Cicely had not opened the packet in her own carriage; and, as the reader has just seen, Agnes thought that it was a paper belonging to the larger document itself. We should add that throughout the remainder of this day Mr. Timperley did not miss the certificate; for he went forth in an agitated state of mind from his office after his interview with his niece, and did not enter it again until the following morning at ten o'clock.

But before this hour on that morning, the packet was consigned to the hands of Winifred Barrington. Agnes was determined to see it safe in the possession of the old captive's granddaughter; and she therefore left Sidney Villa as early as eight o'clock that morning, so that her generous aim should be fulfilled with the least possible delay. The cab which bore her set her down before nine o'clock at the door of Mrs.

Slater's house in Aldersgate Street; for Winifred still resided there. Though possessed of riches, she had made but little change in her mode of living; indeed the only change being the renunciation of working with her needle for the sake of recompense.

Agnes was soon shown up into Winifred's neat little sitting-room; and the moment the usual complimentary greetings were exchanged, our amiable heroine laid upon the table a packet which she had carefully sealed and tied round with a piece of ribbon.

"There, my dear Winifred," she said, "is the document which I have succeeded in obtaining for you. You have to thank the Hon. Mrs. Hardress——"

"Oh! first of all, my dear Miss Evelyn, let me thank you!" exclaimed Winifred, her countenance beaming with the animation of joy. "Kind and excellent friend that you are! how can I ever sufficiently demonstrate my gratitude? You have done a noble action, Miss Evelyn!—you have removed the last barrier which opposed the liberation of my aged grandsire! As for the Hon. Mrs. Hardress, I will write to her—I will thank her likewise!—for Oh! the favour which through the medium of you both I am now receiving, is indeed immense!"

Agnes was well pleased to find that her friend Winifred was rendered so happy by the possession of the deed; and she took her leave, saying, "I will not delay you another instant; for I know that your heart is now yearning to behold the accomplishment of your task and to welcome your grandsire forth into the fresh air of freedom. When he is released, Winifred, and you have a little time to spare, bring him to see me. You must both pass a day with me at Sidney Villa; for it will render me happy to contemplate the joy and felicity which will be reserved for both of you."

Agnes departed; and Winifred, with joyously throbbing bosom, hastened to perform her toilet for going out, that she might repair to Messrs. Cartwright and Co., the legal firm in Chancery Lane, and place the deed in their possession. But while she was about to put on her bonnet, she heard a violent and impatient knock at the front door: the door was opened—and then she heard footsteps rushing up the staircase, as if the person thus coming were in frantic haste. But Ah! those footsteps—good heavens! was it possible? did they not sound like steps which she had heard before some two or three months back? A sensation like that of terror seized upon her brain and upon her heart: she dropped her bonnet—the door was burst open—and her cousin Gustavus made his appearance.

He was about to catch her in his arms; but she held herself back—not with an air of unkindness, but with a becoming maiden firmness,—at the same time giving him her hand, and saying in a collected manner, "You are welcome, Gustavus."

Winifred had all in a moment become completely the mistress over her actions as well as even over the expression of her countenance, however painful to her feelings might have been the effort required for this purpose. There was no coldness in her manner: but her demeanour was that of a young person possessing a proper femi-

nine dignity, and who, for the sake of her own self-respect, was resolved to be respected by one with whom she had formerly stood on other terms.

"Gustavus, you are welcome," she had said, as she gave him her hand.

"Oh, Winifred!" he exclaimed, with an anguished expression of countenance; "I see that you hate me—that you abhor and loathe me——"

"Gustavus," interrupted Winifred, "you have no right to speak thus. It is impossible I can hate you: I experience towards you the greatest interest;—and I hope, Gustavus—I hope, my dear cousin, that you are happy with your wife?"

"Ah, my wife!" cried the young man: "how knew you that she was my wife?"

"How did I know it, Gustavus?" repeated Winifred, with an air of surprise and even of reproach, inasmuch as it struck her for a moment that it was at first his intention to deny that he was married at all. "Did you not go hence with Miss Pinnoke, upwards of two months back, to conduct her to the altar?—were you not seen proceeding together to Doctors' Commons——"

"Who saw us?" demanded Gustavus hastily.

"It matters not," replied Winifred, now speaking with a severe countenance. "Gustavus," she continued, "you appear as if you were inclined to throw some degree of mystery around this particular point—your marriage. Why should you do so? There is not the slightest necessity to stand upon any fastidiousness or punctilio with me. Indeed, since you have come to see me, let it be in all the frankness of our relative position of cousins—or very dear friends——"

"Yes, let it be so," said Gustavus, who did not appear to have a very happy expression of countenance.

Indeed, as Winifred now surveyed him with more attention than at first, the thought gradually grew into her mind that he had a dissipated look, and that the indications of debauchery and profligacy were upon his countenance. The idea distressed her; and as he threw himself upon a seat with an air of lassitude and laquor, she accosted him—she laid her hand upon his shoulder—and looking earnestly into his countenance, she said, "Tell me, Gustavus—I conjure you to tell me,—are you happy in your married state? are you happy with Emily?"

"Happy or miserable," he vehemently exclaimed; "by heaven, I cannot tell! I do not know how I feel—I have almost lost my own identity—I am so altered, Winifred——"

"But, my dear cousin," she said, shocked and frightened at the strangeness of his words and looks, "you surely are happy—and Emily is doubtless a good wife? I know that she loved you dearly—very dearly—she came across the ocean to seek you——"

"True!" exclaimed Gustavus; and it struck Winifred that a bitter smile crossed his jaded countenance. "There is no more doubt as to her love than there is as to the violence of the fires that agitate within the crater of Vesuvius! There are fires, Winifred, which warm and cheer with their genial heat, and infuse pleasurable feelings into the heart. But there are likewise fires which scorch and burn you—which render the atmosphere oppressive and overpowering——"

"Oh, Gustavus!" murmured Winifred, almost melting into tears, "do you mean me to understand from all this that you are not happy?"

"I tell you, Winifred, that I do not know what my feelings are! I ought to be happy perhaps—and yet I don't know, but there are times when I think that I am the most miserable wretch in existence! But tell me, Winnie," he suddenly interrupted himself; "you received the gold all safe?"

"Yes, Gustavus—all safe," she replied: "and let me assure you that the boon you have thus conferred upon your grandfather, constitutes the finest chapter in your life!"

"Ah! I was resolved, Winnie," responded Gustavus, "that you should have the gold as soon as possible. Emily wished to keep it back until our hands were indissolubly joined, or until we stood upon the deck of a vessel to bear us back to the West Indies: but I vowed that there should be no delay—I would not even accompany her to procure the marriage-license until the gold was sent hither;—for amidst all my grief at that memorable period, Winifred, I thought of whatsoever atonement I could best make——"

"Gustavus," she interrupted him, "speak of nothing in the form of atonement to myself! The only feeling I entertain towards you is that of a friendly—a fond interest. But you have not inquired concerning your grandfather."

"Tell me of him!" ejaculated Gustavus: "is he well? has not the gold sufficed——"

"To effect his emancipation? Not yet: there have been delays—but to-day or to-morrow he will be free."

"Oh! say you so, dear Winifred? These are indeed joyous tidings!"—but even as Gustavus thus spoke, with an apparent fervour of tone, there was nevertheless a certain abstraction in his manner,—as if other subjects would persist in obtruding upon the thoughts which he endeavoured to fix upon his young relative who was present, and the image of the old one who was within the prison-walls at a little distance.

"Gustavus," said Winifred, "I do sincerely hope that you have for some reason or another been deceiving me, when striving to make me fancy that you are not happy in your married condition. Tell me that you have been misrepresenting and exaggerating——"

"By heaven, my dear cousin," exclaimed Gustavus, "I scarcely know what words to use when speaking of Emily! We were married—and we went to Paris: for I know not how it was, but I vowed that I would not immediately cross the Atlantic and return to Jamaica. Emily encouraged me to plunge into all kinds of pleasures—that is to say, so long as they were such recreations as she could partake in. She has plenty of money: she made me buy horses and carriages—she forced me to mingle in fashionable society—to give elegant entertainments——In short, my dear Winifred, the two months and upwards which have elapsed since you and I parted, have been a constant whirl of pleasure, until I am sated and palled with all these delights and blandishments! There is within me the incessant consciousness that Emily is ever striving to enmesh me in a perfect web of dissipation, recreations, festivities, and amusements, as if I were a child whose good temper could only be



secured by a constant administration of sugar-plums. I am sick of pleasure!—the penance of a monk would be a happy change! Picture to yourself Emily and me when we are alone together. Is there any domestic happiness?—is there the sociable discourse which ought to subsist between husband and wife? No!—but upon the table you will see fruits and champagne—and Emily is to me a dusky-complexioned Hebe, ever filling goblets which she fancies I must be ever ready to quaff! Now, my dear Winifred, you begin to comprehend something of this life which we lead together;—and from what you have ever known of me, you may perhaps form a conjecture whether it be the mode of existence best calculated to ensure my happiness.”

Gustavus paused for a few moments, tapping his foot upon the carpet with a nervous agitation; while Winifred, much distressed at all she had thus heard, was nevertheless at a loss what remark to

make; for it was to a certain extent of a successful rival that she was thus hearing the character given, and she felt herself to be delicately placed.

“But this is not all,” resumed Gustavus, with a certain degree of abruptness. “Everything goes pleasantly and agreeably enough so long as I agree to float on with the tide of luxury and pleasure on which I find myself cast,—quaffing the sparkling wine whenever it is presented, and steeping all my senses as it were in a fount of dissipation. But if ever I propose some other course—if ever I venture to offer a suggestion that might have the effect of changing any of Emily’s plans—Ah! then how different does she become! My swarthy Venus of the West Indies demonstrates the fury of a very Juno in her ire——”

“Gustavus, Gustavus!” interrupted Winifred; “I feel that I ought not to listen to all this! Yet will I say one word. Surely you can wield a husband’s authority——”

"Ah—a husband's authority!" he ejaculated, with a bitter smile: "such an authority as one of her uncle's own negroes in Jamaica, although calling himself emancipated, may be supposed to possess over his own destinies! But I will not weary or vex you, Winifred, with the details of the existence that I lead. Suffice it to say that last night we arrived in London—this morning I escaped from Emily's vigilance—in plain terms stole away while she slept! for I was resolved that I would see you once more, dearest cousin—"

"Ah! then you are at length going to Jamaica?" said Winifred. "Well, it is kind of you, Gustavus, to think of seeing us again; for of course you will go and visit your grandfather—"

"Will he not blame me, Winifred? what excuse did you make on my behalf?"

"At first I told him that Mr. Pinnock had sent for you from Jamaica—that your departure was so hurried you could not possibly bid him farewell—"

"Ah! but about the marriage, Winifred?" said Gustavus: "what did you tell our grandsire—"

"I have gradually broken to him the truth," rejoined Winifred, her voice for a moment becoming tremulous, and then growing firm again. "He now knows all—he will not blame you, Gustavus—he will receive you with open arms—And, Ah!" exclaimed Winifred as a thought struck her, "you shall have the pleasure, my dear cousin, of presenting your aged relative with the talisman of his liberty—"

"What do you mean, Winifred?" inquired Gustavus.

"Take this packet," she cried,—"*hasten to the prison, and tell our venerable grandfather that it is the deed which Mr. Timperley held. Oh, then, Gustavus, you will see how fervidly he will embrace you!—and when you depart from England, it will be with the satisfaction of having become the medium of infusing so much joy and happiness into the heart of that old man!*"

"Then come with me, dear Winnie," exclaimed Gustavus, "and we will have the satisfaction of together imparting and sharing this happiness whereof you speak!"

"No, my dear cousin," said Winifred, "go you alone to visit our grandsire. If we went together, he might put questions to you which would be embarrassing to both. Besides, Gustavus, as you are on the point of taking your departure from your native land—as you will settle in another clime—and as perhaps you may never again see our grandfather—here Winifred was for an instant half-suffocated with emotion, but she quickly recovered herself—"for all these reasons, my dear Gustavus, it were infinitely better that you should go alone—for the more there are present at such a leave-taking, the more affecting and distressing is it!"

"Be it as you say," rejoined Gustavus: "I will go and bid farewell to our grandfather. Then I will return to you, Winnie—"

"I shall await your presence here," said the young lady: "but you must not be long, Gustavus, for after all you have told me—"

"Ah! you think that Emily will be looking after me?" he exclaimed, attempting to carry off

the idea with a laugh—but it sounded hollow, and its expression on his countenance was sickly. "No—I scarcely think she would go to such an extreme—But at all events I will be off; and I will return to you, Winnie, as soon as possible."

Thus speaking, Gustavus secured about his person the packet containing the precious deed; and he quitted Mrs. Slater's house. He was hurrying along Aldersgate Street in the direction of the nearest turning that would lead him to Whitecross Street Prison, when he suddenly encountered his wife! She had a veil over her face, but through it he at once recognised that superbly handsome countenance, with its dusky complexion; and even if that veil had been of impenetrable thickness, he would have recognised her all the same by the admirable symmetry of her form, even though she might be wearing a costume in which he had never seen her apparelled before.

"Now," he instantaneously thought to himself, "for a storm of passion! But heaven defend me from a scene in the streets!"

How great therefore was the surprise of Gustavus, when Emily on accosting him threw up her veil, and said with a smile of indescribable sweetness, "So you have been to see your relations, Gustavus? You were right. But why, my dear husband, did you not make me aware of your intentions, so that I might have had the pleasure of accompanying you?"

"Why, the truth is, my dear Emily," responded Gustavus, "you were sleeping so soundly that I did not like to awake you: so I thought I would steal off before breakfast—"

"To be sure!" said the quodroon, taking her husband's arm. "And have you seen your grandfather?"

"No, not yet—but I have seen my cousin—Winifred you know—" and Gustavus hesitated somewhat, as if he fancied there was a little jealousy upon this point, and that he was therefore treading upon delicate ground.

And he was right; for a flush suddenly crossed the dusky countenance of the quodroon, while fires flashed from her luminous eyes; and she murmured to herself, "Ah! he sees his cousin Winifred first, before he visits the old man!"—then raising her looks, which had in an instant become smiling again, she said, "And is your cousin Winifred quite well? is she still living at the same place? and has she as yet made use of the gold?"

"She is quite well—she is still living at the same place—and as for the gold, my dear Emily, it will almost immediately be used to effect my grandfather's liberation. I am now going to the prison to see the old man—"

"How I should like to accompany you!" exclaimed Emily. "To form the acquaintance of this venerable and much persecuted relation of yours—"

"Oh, Emily! are you serious?" cried Gustavus, in an enthusiastic paroxysm of joy. "A thousand thanks for the kind interest you thus take—"

"Thanks, Gustavus?—do you speak of thanks?" asked Emily, in a tone which may be described as kindly reproachful. "Is it not a duty which I am performing to display an interest in your venerable relative, as well as I feel an interest in everything else that concerns you?"

"Ah! you are a dear good Emily, after all!"

said Gustavus, now gazing with impassioned fervour upon the remarkably handsome countenance of the quadroon, while he felt her glowing bosom heaving against his arm as she clung to it.

"Well, Gustavus," she said, "I think that if I have a fault it is loving you too devotedly! If at times there have been paroxysms of anger on my part—displays of temper——"

"Do not allude to them, Emily!" said Gustavus, whose heart was so easily brought into complete subjection beneath the fascinating powers of the beautiful quadroon: "the kindness of your present conduct is atoning for everything! Come—we are now on our way to the prison—and then afterwards, Emily, I must just return for a moment to my cousin's lodgings—but only for a moment, you know, just to bid her farewell—and you can come with me if you like——"

"Oh, I will go anywhere with you," said Emily; "but we must first return to the hotel——"

"Return to the hotel first?" asked Gustavus.

"Yes, assuredly," rejoined the quadroon. "I have not partaken of any breakfast—neither have you—I am faint—and you must be famished——"

"But it will not take us long, dearest Emily, to make these calls; and since we are in the neighbourhood——"

"Well, my beloved husband," she interrupted him, "I feel at this moment as if I could do anything to oblige you: but really you must suffer me to have my own way in one little respect. You are about to introduce me to your grandfather; and is it not natural that I should desire to win his good opinion—to appear before him with my best looks——"

"And when did you ever look more charming than you do at this moment, Emily?" asked Gustavus, surveying with intensest admiration the beautiful countenance of his quadroon wife.

"Ah! you are kind to say so," rejoined Emily, with one of her sweetest smiles; "but I do not feel like myself in this plain morning dress—with my hair only hurriedly arranged—with not a single particle of jewellery about my person——"

"You never looked handsomer, Emily;—and in Jamaica I often used to think that you were most ravishingly beautiful when simply clad in your white dress and your large straw hat——"

"But we are not in Jamaica now," interrupted the quadroon, with a smile: "we are in a country where much stress is placed upon suitable and decent apparel. Now therefore, Gustavus, let me have my own way: we will return to the hotel—we will partake of breakfast—I will then dress myself in a suitable manner—and we will proceed to visit your grandfather, as well as your cousin Winifred."

"Well, be it so," said the young man, who by this time was quite accustomed to yield to the wishes of his wife, as she herself was accustomed to enforce her own will either by means of winning cajoleries or impetuous outbursts of passion.

"After all," thought Gustavus to himself, "it will only be the delay of about an hour—or an hour and a half; and that will be no consequence. Besides, Emily is in such an unusually good humour, and has suddenly taken such a fancy towards my relatives, that it would be a perfect sin to say or do ought to ruffle her temper."

The hotel at which they had established their

temporary quarters, was in the City, and at no very great distance from the spot where they had encountered each other. They had only arrived in London at a late hour on the preceding evening: they were then much fatigued, and they were not therefore inclined to repair to any great distance before retiring to rest. Besides, Emily had another reason for remaining in the City in preference to patronising a West End hotel. This was because the firm of Millard and Co., Mr. Pinnock's London correspondents, had a ship just ready to clear out from the West India Docks,—a circumstance which had been privately communicated to the quadroon, and of which she was resolved to take advantage. Indeed, this was the principal consideration which had induced her to suggest that they should stay at a City hotel, instead of proceeding to more fashionable quarters.

The hotel was soon reached: the husband and wife ascended to the private sitting-room which they had hired—and breakfast was served up. Emily exerted all her powers to please and fascinate Gustavus—to render herself agreeable to him—and to put him in such an excellent humour as should induce him to do ample justice to the repast. He fell completely into the way in which her wiles tended to lead him; and when he had partaken of his coffee, it required little or no pressing on her part to make him imbibe a glass or two of *liqueur*. He then felt a drowsiness coming over him; Emily affected to be impressed with the conviction that he was unwell—that he was suffering from indigestion, or from the fatigues of recent travelling—that he must therefore go to bed and rest himself. Gustavus was too much overpowered by the soporific drug which Emily had mixed with the *liqueur*, to think or act for himself: he had but a dim recollection of the proposed visit to be made to his grandfather—he suffered Emily to lead him to the chamber, where she helped to disapparel him—he lay down on the couch—and in a few minutes was wrapped in a profound stupor.

When Emily was assured that her husband slept thus deeply, she put on her bonnet and shawl, and hastened forth from the hotel. She proceeded by the Blackwall Railway to the West India Docks; and there she instituted every requisite inquiry respecting the vessel belonging to the firm of Millard and Co. which was ready to sail. She had an interview with the captain, in whose hands she placed a liberal bribe; and a speedy understanding was arrived at between them.

"You be prepared, ma'am, to night between nine and ten o'clock," said the captain, at the termination of the conference; "and all shall be carried into effect as you propose. I shan't send any of my sailors, because it is a thing that might be talked of afterwards—and that is what I would rather avoid: but there's always a lot of fellows hanging about the docks that will do any job for a bribe—and I will trust the business to two or three of them."

Emily, having settled matters to her satisfaction with the captain of the ship, returned to the hotel. Gustavus was still sleeping; and as she bent over him, she thought within herself, "Yes—this is the only plan! His mind will continue restless so long as he remains near those relatives of his: he will never be completely tranquil and happy until he is again at Mount Pleasant. Poor

Gustavus! it grieves me thus to deal with thee: but what am I to do? Thine heart still seems to have a slight secret yearning towards Winifred—and I must tear thee away from her! You must be wholly mine—not partially! If I were to live on with the conviction that thy remembrances and thy thoughts are tending towards another, I should go mad—I could not endure it! No, no—I could not!”

Emily stood by the side of the couch for some minutes, watching the face of her sleeping husband; and then consulting her watch, she found that it was past the hour of noon. She proceeded to dress herself in handsome apparel; and she presently ordered luncheon to be spread upon the table in the sitting-room. Between one and two o'clock Gustavus awoke—or rather he began by degrees to shake off the drowsiness which a profound slumber from soporific effects had left behind it. Emily was by his side, to lavish caresses upon him—to charm him with her blandishments. There she was, his beautiful quadroom wife,—radiant with smiles—assuring him that he now looked quite well—that the sleep had evidently refreshed him—and that it was fortunate he had taken her advice and yielded to that inclination for repose. Gustavus suspected not that the *liqueur* had been drugged: he could not suppose Emily capable of such a piece of wickedness; and therefore the idea did not for a single instant enter his head. On the contrary, he firmly believed that he must have been seized with a sudden indisposition. He did not however feel quite so well as Emily assured him that he looked: he was languid—he experienced a disinclination to exert himself: there was a certain sinking at the heart and a faintness at the stomach, as if he required a stimulant. It was therefore with no great difficulty that the quadroom persuaded him, so soon as he was again dressed, to sit down and partake of the luncheon which was ready served in the adjoining room.

“Yes,” said Gustavus, “I do indeed feel as if I needed refreshment. But after lunch, Emily, we must really delay not in paying those visits—”

“You see, my dear Gustavus, that I am ready dressed for the purpose,” answered Emily. “There is plenty of time—we will tell your grandfather that you were seized with some slight indisposition—”

“But Winifred will think it strange that I have suffered these hours to elapse without calling at the prison!—and then too there is a document of some importance which Winifred gave me, and which I put in my pocket—”

“Do not distress yourself upon these points,” said his quadroom wife: “it is no more than two o'clock, and by three o'clock we will be at the prison. Recline upon that sofa, my dear Gustavus—partake of the champagne—it will exhilarate and refresh you; and you will be in all the better spirits for the interview with your grandfather.”

But instead of acquiring energy and strength to seek that interview, Gustavus experienced the sense of drowsiness returning upon him: he endeavoured to shake it off—but he could not,—and perhaps all the less because his head was now pillowed upon his wife's bosom, and it was delightful thus to repose in the arms of the beautiful

quadroom. In a few minutes Gustavus again slept profoundly.

When he awoke, candles were burning in the apartment—the cloth was laid for dinner—the plate and the glass were reflecting the rays of those waxlights. The curtains were closed—a cheerful fire was blazing in the grate—the wine sparkled in the decanters upon the snow-white table-cloth. And there sat Emily, now in evening costume—to her she had again changed her apparel; and to the eyes of her husband she looked more wondrously beautiful than ever. Her arms were naked almost to the shoulders; and how superbly modelled were those arms!—how robustly rounded, and yet how perfect in their symmetry!—how warm and glowing even to the look! Warm and glowing likewise were the rich contours of that bust which the low corsage of the dress half-revealed; and in contrast with the duskiness of the skin there was a necklace of pearls, defining the luxuriant shape of the bosom on which it rested. How clear, how transparent was that skin!—how finely grained in its olive hue! And her hair was all flowing in its jetty luxuriance upon her sloping shoulders and down her back; and the light of the wax candles shining upon her countenance showed the delicate equiline configuration of the profile, and set off the moist redness of the lips—affording a glimpse likewise of the teeth of ivory whiteness, as those lips were slightly apart. And her eyes—those large luminous handsome eyes—were at first half-curtained beneath their long thick ebony fringes; and then they were slowly bent upon Gustavus to see if he were still sleeping.

When Emily perceived that his eyes were open, and that as he lay upon the sofa he was surveying her with impassioned admiration, she uttered an ejaculation of joy—she flew towards him—those warm glowing arms were clasped around his neck—and his face was pressed to that warm glowing bosom. Then she bent over him—she lavished kisses upon his lips, his cheeks, and his brow—she tapped his face with all the appearance of affectionate playfulness—and her large luminous eyes looked down into the depths of his own, as if reflecting as well as infusing the unspeakable tenderness that filled her heart.

“Dearest Gus,” she said, after a little while, “do you know that I have been uneasy on your account?—for I did not like these fits of drowsiness. You have been again slumbering for hours: it is now six o'clock in the evening—”

“Oh, my poor grandfather! how I have neglected him!” exclaimed Gustavus. “And Winifred—what must she think? And that document too—”

“Do not make yourself uneasy, dearest Gus,” said Emily. “I have sent kind messages to both—I have sent the packet likewise—yes, to Mr. Barrington—”

“Oh, how thoughtful of you!—how good! how generous!” cried the young man, fervidly embracing his beautiful quadroom wife.

“But this is not all,” continued Emily. “I tell you that I was uneasy in respect to this renewed slumber on your part—I sent for a surgeon—and Oh, Gustavus! you can imagine what a relief it was to my mind when I was assured that there was nothing to fear—nothing to apprehend—and that to-morrow you would be entirely your-

self again. Besides, I am sure you feel better now—do you not?"

"Infinitely better," answered Gustavus: then looking at the snowy table-cloth, and the shining plate, and the glittering wine—all seeming to give promise of an excellent repast—he added, "And I feel too, Emily, as if I could do justice to the dinner."

"We will have it served up at once—for it is past six o'clock, I declare!" exclaimed the quadrone, looking at her watch.

The bell was rung accordingly—the repast was served up; and as again Gustavus experienced a certain languor hanging about him—a certain sinking at the heart and sickness at the stomach, he had recourse to stimulants to remove those uneasy sensations. Thus so far as he was concerned, the champagne flowed with considerable freedom; while Emily appeared to be taking her own share of the exhilarating beverage, though in reality she drank but little. Yet more luminous, if possible, grew her large black eyes—more richly mantled the blood through the diaphanous duskiness of her complexion—and more sensuously tender seemed the smiles which parted her moist red lips: more musical than ever appeared the tones of her fluid voice. Gustavus was completely under the empire of her fascinations; and when she said to him, "It is too late now to think of visiting your grandiere,"—he readily answered, "Yes, dearest, we will see the poor old man the first thing after breakfast to-morrow." And when she said to him, "Your cousin, you know, will not be uneasy at your absence, as the message I sent will have accounted for it,"—Gustavus replied, "So long as I know that Winifred is not uneasy, I would rather remain here alone with you, my beloved and beautiful Emily, than think of going elsewhere!"

Perhaps the reader will scarcely require to be informed that Emily was playing a game of complete duplicity. She had sent for no medical attendance whatsoever, because she had perfectly well known under what influences Gustavus had been sleeping, and she was not therefore uneasy on his account. Neither had she sent any messages to old Mr. Barrington or Winifred. Her only object was to keep her husband away from those relatives: she valued not their feelings—she cared not for them, so intense was her own selfishness; and so far from forwarding any message to them, she was careful not to afford them the slightest clue to the hotel where Gustavus and herself were staying. For in the course of conversation during the walk home to that hotel in the morning, Emily had dexterously gleaned from Gustavus the fact that he had not mentioned his present address to his cousin Winifred. Gustavus had said something to Emily about a document of importance which he was charged to deliver to his old grandiere; and the quadrone would really have sent it to Mr. Barrington, were it not for the reason already mentioned—namely, that she was afraid of affording any clue to the present whereabouts of Gustavus. She had found the packet in his coat-pocket; and she had locked it up in one of her own trunks, with the intention of leaving it in charge of the hotel-waiter the last thing ere her departure, so that it might be forwarded on the ensuing day to its destination.

The cloth having been removed, the dessert was placed upon the table; and Emily had taken care that all the most costly fruits should be provided so as to please the eye and tempt the appetite of her husband—for her great object was now to keep him with her, and to induce him to drink copiously of the champagne which was served up, and which was a wine whereof he was particularly fond. She exerted all her own powers to please, to fascinate, and to ravish him—so that he was as much intoxicated with the blandishments of his syren-wife as with the exhilarating juice of Epernay. At length, in a condition of the completest ebriety, he sank back upon the sofa, and fell into the utter unconsciousness of slumber.

A smile of indescribable triumph now appeared upon the rich red lips of the quadrone; and her luminous black eyes flashed with a kindred fire. She looked at her watch; and she ejaculated within herself, "They will soon be here!"

In a few minutes a waiter entered the room, saying, "If you please, ma'am, two men have come in all haste from the West India Docks!"

"Indeed!" ejaculated Emily, as if taken by surprise. "From the Docks?"

"Yes, ma'am—for it seems that all the passengers who have taken berths in Mr. Millard's ship, must be on board before midnight. So the Captain has sent these men to bring this notice, and to fetch your luggage——"

"Good heavens, how provoking!" exclaimed Emily, glancing towards the sleeping Gustavus, with a well-affected air of mingled annoyance and mortification. "It would be useless to conceal from you," she continued, thus addressing the waiter, "that Mr. Barrington has taken too much of your good wine——indeed he is completely overcome by it! hours must elapse before he will be sufficiently recovered to awake——"

"Well, ma'am," said the waiter, "if it is absolutely necessary for you to go by this ship——"

"We have taken our berths in it!—the money is paid!" exclaimed Emily. "Look! here are the receipts!"

"Well, ma'am," resumed the waiter, "there is but one course to adopt—begging pardon for the boldness with which I offer the advice—but those two men who have come in the cab can easily convey the gentleman down-stairs——"

"Ah! but the exposure!" exclaimed Emily, clasping her hands as if in despair: "the idea of being thus disgraced and degraded——"

"There is a private staircase, ma'am," said the waiter; "and if you will leave it to me, everything shall be contrived for the very best."

"Yes," she said; "it is the only alternative! I am greatly obliged to you—manage the matter as you have suggested—and I will reward you liberally."

"Are the trunks and boxes all ready, ma'am?" inquired the waiter.

"Yes—nearly so. But let these men get my husband away at once: they can take two or three of the heaviest trunks with them—and I will presently follow in another cab with the remainder."

The waiter quitted the room; and in a few moments the two men who had been hired for this particular service, made their appearance. Raising Gustavus in their arms, they wrapped him in a large cloak—they carried him

upon the landing—there the waiter was in readiness to conduct them to the private staircase—and in a few more instants the unconscious Gustavus was safely stowed away in the cab. Meanwhile the hotel-porter was conveying down-stairs such of Emily's boxes as appeared to be in readiness for removal; while she was preparing to settle the hotel bill which had just been presented to her. The accommodating waiter quickly reappeared; and Emily, on paying the account, bestowed upon him a liberal reward. She then passed into the bed chamber to make certain requisite changes in her toilet previous to embarkation. She now recollected the document which was to have been delivered to old Mr. Barrington, but which she had locked up in one of her trunks. Alas! the very trunk in which she had thus secured that packet, was amongst those which had been already sent away. Emily was now for a moment frightened: she knew not what injury might result from this oversight. But she quickly reflected that when on board the vessel she might take the packet from the box, and discover some means of forwarding it, unknown to her husband, to Whitecross Street Prison. Reassured by this reflection, Emily hastened to put off her evening costume and to apparel herself in thick warm raiment. She then departed from the hotel, taking the remnant of her luggage with her; and in due time she reached the West India Docks.

Her husband was sleeping in his berth on board the ship. Poor Gustavus! little suspected he in his dreams how the selfish feelings of his quadroon wife had engendered so many machinations, to the duplicity of which he was not the only victim! Little suspected he that at that very hour his cousin Winifred was almost like a distracted being—and that his grandsire was weeping in his prison chamber—all because of that sudden disappearance which was so inexplicable to them both!

Emily lost no time in applying to the Captain of the ship in respect to the boxes which she had first of all sent on board. She was informed that they had been let down into the hold, and that it was impossible to get at them, as quantities of other merchandise had since been lowered into the same place.

"Why, ma'am," said the Captain, "I thought you knew very well that all such luggage as you did not want for your use during the voyage, must be thus stowed away. So, when those men came with your husband, and said they had also brought the heavy boxes, and that you would follow in another cab with the lighter ones, I took it for granted that those which came first were to go below."

"But it is of importance," said Emily, "that I should have access to one of those trunks."

"It couldn't be done now if you was to give me a hundred guineas," answered the Captain. "Mr. Millard will be on board directly, to give his last instructions; and as I think you said you didn't want to see him, you had better get below, ma'am, at once. Besides, your husband may want looking to."

"True!" said Emily: and she descended to the cabin, where Gustavus lay plunged in a condition of complete unconsciousness.

Emily was greatly vexed at this incident in respect to the sealed packet. In her endeavours to

keep her husband beyond the sphere of that influence which she feared or fancied his relatives might be enabled to exercise over him, she by no means intended to do any direct and positive wrong towards either of those persons. But now she apprehended that she had been unguardedly led into some such instance of wrongdoing; and she was at first materially vexed—nay, even distressed. But her's was a mind which was not likely to suffer little evils to annoy it for any lengthened period, when it had so much cause for rejoicing at a great triumph that had been achieved; and she therefore consoled herself by mentally ejaculating, "Well, it cannot be helped! I must keep the untoward incident a complete secret from Gustavus; and on arriving at Kingston the first thing to do will be the transmission of the packet back to England by some trustworthy hand!"

CHAPTER LVII.

FRESH MISFORTUNES.

WINIFRED BARRINGTON remained at her lodgings, awaiting the return of her cousin Gustavus whom she fancied to be at Whitecross Street Prison. For some time she remained plunged in a painful reverie. It was evident that Gustavus was not happy in his married state, and that the hot blood of the quadroon boiled with those strong passions which were but little calculated to ensure domestic peace. Winifred was profoundly afflicted at the thought that Gustavus should have wedded misery, for which even the acquisition of wealth was not an indemnification; and there was a moment when Miss Barrington could not help thinking within herself, "It is a retribution for his conduct towards me!" But the next instant the generous girl repudiated the idea—she even felt distressed as well as ashamed of herself for having entertained it—and she strove to turn her thoughts into another channel.

"Gustavus is now with his grandsire!" she said to herself. "Oh! how fondly have they embraced! and the poor old man's heart is warming towards him! And they have much to talk of! Yes—and Gustavus has much to explain, if indeed he will suffer himself to be led into explanations! But it were better not—Oh, it were better not! Let the simple fact suffice for our grandsire as I myself have mentioned it,—yes, the simple fact that Gustavus has espoused the quadroon Emily—and in reference to his conduct towards me—nothing!"

While Winifred is giving way to her reflections, we will avail ourselves of the opportunity to afford the reader a few necessary explanations. At first when the gold arrived in England, the utmost reserve had been maintained towards old Mr. Barrington, inasmuch as it was apprehended that he would insist upon embarking all the newly acquired wealth in the prosecution of his lawsuit. But since his affairs had been placed in the hands of Messrs. Cartwright, and under the supervision of Mr. Wardour, it gradually became plainer and plainer that his cause was a good one, and if properly and expeditiously conducted it must evi-

dently result in success. Thus by degrees the truth was broken to Mr. Barrington: it was represented to him that his affairs were being unravelled—that his emancipation from gaol would probably be the first triumph to be celebrated—and that the gaining of his tedious Chancery suit would perhaps become a worthy sequence. While these revelations were thus being made to the old man, he was at the same time permitted to obtain an insight into the fact that many thousands of pounds were standing in Winifred's name in the Bank of England, and that the bulk of this little fortune would be absorbed in the liquidation of the judgment-debts which detained him in prison. Finally, after a time, the whole position of his affairs was revealed to him; and amidst all other details he was made aware of the circumstance that an important deed must be forthcoming from Mr. Timperley's hands ere the prison-doors could be thrown open to afford him egress.

Notwithstanding the caution with which all these circumstances had been gradually and successively explained to Mr. Barrington, they had nevertheless so excited him at times that Winifred almost wished a full and complete reserve had been maintained until everything was accomplished. But on the other hand she reflected that it was absolutely necessary thus to prepare the old man for the final issue of all his difficulties and embarrassments, inasmuch as the effect might be too great for him if everything were made known at once. Still the anticipation of personal liberty first of all, and then of victory in respect to his lawsuit, was almost more than sufficient to drive Mr. Barrington crazy with joy; and he was now more excited, if possible, with happiness at the prospect of that suit's speedy termination, than he had ever been by affliction on account of its delay.

On the particular morning of which we are now writing—namely, that when Winifred was cherishing the belief that Gustavus was with her grandfathers—the old man himself was walking to and fro in the gaol-yard, while some poorer prisoner was preparing his breakfast. Winnie had always taken care that he should be as decently dressed as her means would permit: but now he was well dressed. He had coveted a black velvet skull-cap with a gold tassel—and he possessed it: he had coveted a particular kind of flowered silk dressing-gown—and he possessed it. He had then ventured to ask for a silver watch: his wish had been more than attended to, for Winifred had purchased him a gold one. And now a nice little breakfast was being prepared for him: the eggs were boiling—the ham was broiling—the coffee was simmering—the rolls were keeping hot before the fire—and on one of the tables in the ward a snowy napkin (supplied by Winifred) was spread—and the said snowy napkin was embellished by a neat little tea-service. In a word, Mr. Barrington enjoyed everything as comfortably as one could possibly find his little domestic affairs thus conducted within the walls of a gaol.

"And I tell you what I shall do, Robus," said Mr. Barrington, to another elderly prisoner with whom he was walking in the court-yard, while the breakfast was being gotten in readiness as just described,—“I shall give a grand dinner to all the inmates of my ward—roast beef and plum-pudding, and a pot of porter each, Robus——”

"Or ale, according to taste," suggested Mr. Robus, "because some don't drink porter—and I'm one who don't."

"Well, ale or porter," exclaimed old Barrington, "it is just the same to me—you shall have your choice, my boy! I remember having told Winnie over and over again that I should give such a banquet when I get my discharge——"

"But it has not come yet, you know, Mr. Barrington," interjected Robus, who being himself an old gaol-bird, had become saturated with all the petty covies and jealousies which flourish in small communities, like weeds of rakest luxuriance in limited marshy spots;—and therefore Mr. Robus inwardly hoped that Mr. Barrington would not obtain his discharge, and would not have an opportunity of giving the grand banquet whereof he was speaking.

"No—I haven't got it yet," exclaimed Winifred's grandfather; "but I shall have it in a day or two: so don't be afraid, Robus—you'll get your roast beef and plum-pudding and your pot of the best ale!"

"Well, we shall see. By the bye, Mr. Barrington, I think I have heard you say on more occasions than one that you never would leave this place unless your own carriage came to fetch you? I suppose that part of the business won't hold good?"

"But it will, though!" exclaimed the old man, stepping short and rubbing his hands: "I tell you that it will, though! Yes—Winifred told me so yesterday!—she assured me it should be so!"

"Well, I only hope it may," rejoined Mr. Robus, with that sort of dry tone and cynical mistrustful air which are as much as to imply that the individual hopes the very contrary will be the case.

"And we shall have a fine house, Robus," continued old Barrington; "and we shall invite all our friends—and when you get out of this place, you shall come and dine with us—and you and I will crack a bottle together while talking of old times and past events."

"Ah! we'll crack the bottle *when* all this takes place,—that you are free and I am free, and you are in a large house of your own:"—and then Mr. Robus hummed an air, which seemed as much as to imply as if he thought all these eventualities to be likely to be postponed until "the bloom should be upon the rye."

"And as for those Dalhams," suddenly exclaimed old Barrington, "if ever I meet either of them, father or son——"

"Well, you'll ask them to crack a bottle with you," said Mr. Robus, who on this particular morning was more than usually prone to be ill-natured in his remarks—perhaps because his own prospects were more than usually dismal and dreary.

"I drink wine with them!" almost yelled forth old Barrington: "I drink wine with the Dalhams! No!—I would sooner perish of a burning thirst in the midst of a desert! I drink wine with the Dalhams! Why, that means to shake hands with them—to be friendly with them—to forgive them all the past——"

"Well, of course it does!" said Mr. Robus. "And do you mean to pretend that if you do

ever happen to get free, you won't be ready to shake hands in your joy with all the world—not even excepting Jack Ketch himself?"

"With all the world except two persons!" answered old Barrington emphatically; "and Jack Ketch is not one of those persons—and Mr. Timperley is not another,—though the former be the most loathsome of human creatures, and the latter as great a villain as ever walked on two legs. But still, on the day of obtaining my liberty, I would shake hands with even *them*! The two exceptions that I make"—and here old Barrington looked earnestly with his keen eyes upon the countenance of his companion Robus, while his angular features seemed to grow more peaked with malignant spite, like those of a vixenish woman while giving way to her ill temper,—“the two exceptions are Sir John Dalham and Roderick Dalham.”

"Ah, well—we shall see," said Mr. Robus, shrugging his shoulders, as much as to imply that he never put faith in vows that were strongly or rashly taken.

"Yes—you will see!" exclaimed the old captive. "How many thousands and thousands of times have I taken this oath within myself!—how many hundreds of times have I even gone down upon my knees, and invoked heaven's curses upon me if I ever deviated from that course of bitter burning enmity—of fierce unquenchable rancour—towards the hated Dalhams!"

"Well then, Mr. Barrington, I think you have done very wrong," said Mr. Robus; "for whenever I go down upon my knees—which I am sorry to say is not very often—it is to ask for blessings on my own head, instead of curses on the heads of my enemies. I haven't time for too much prayer—so I think of Number One first."

At this moment the poor prisoner who acted as Mr. Barrington's servitor, came forward to announce that the breakfast was served up; and the old captive accordingly proceeded to his morning's meal. When it was over, he sat reading the newspaper for about an hour: then looking at his watch, and finding that it was eleven o'clock, he began to wonder that Winnifred did not make her appearance. He returned into the court-yard to walk with Mr. Robus: but in about half-an-hour Winnifred was descried hastening towards her grandfather.

"My dearest girl—my sweetest Winnie," exclaimed the old man, "you are unusually late——"

"Is it possible, my dear grandfather, that Gustavus has not been? The turnkey assures me——"

"Gustavus?—No, Winnie!" cried Mr. Barrington in amazement.

"And the deed—the document—has it not been sent in to you?" asked Winnifred, in breathless suspense.

"Deed—document?—nothing of the sort!" ejaculated Mr. Barrington. "But you absolutely look frightened, Winnie——"

"Frightened, frightened," she said, gasping, and becoming very pale. "What can this mean? I waited and waited, thinking he was sure to come back to my lodgings——"

"What do you mean, Winnifred?" asked Mr. Barrington. "Come, my child—tell me—I begin to be seriously alarmed——"

"What can have happened? Oh why does he not come?" exclaimed Winnifred vaguely: then suddenly recollecting that she was keeping her grandsire in a state of the most painful suspense, she hurriedly explained herself in the following manner:—"Gustavus came to me just now—he has been in France with his wife—they returned yesterday to London—he was anxious to see you—to bid you farewell, for he is going away to the West Indies——"

"Then why does he not come?" asked old Mr. Barrington.

"Ah! that is what I do not know—that is what is bewildering me!" exclaimed Winnifred. "But there is still something worse! The deed was obtained from Mr. Timperley—Miss Evelyn procured it through the medium of Mrs. Hardees—I gave it to Gustavus to bring to you—I thought that it would afford him pleasure——"

"Well, well, Winnie," said the old man: "rest assured he will come presently! Perhaps he might have met some friend——"

"Perhaps so!" said Winnifred, clutching at the hope. "Yes—perhaps he will come presently!"

But hours passed away, and Gustavus came not. A dozen times did Winnifred speed to her lodgings from the prison, and to the prison from her lodgings: but still no tidings of Gustavus—not a note! not a message!—and the deed—that precious deed, on which so much depended—it was not forthcoming! Winnifred was bewildered what to think. If her cousin had fallen in with his wife, and the wife had displayed her domineering temper by insisting on his alienating himself from his relatives—still the packet might have been delivered either at her own lodgings or at the prison. But all conjecture was useless:—hour after hour passed—evening came—night set in—and still no Gustavus!

It was a couch of sleepless wretchedness which poor Winnifred pressed that night; and when she arose in the morning, she felt as ill, as dejected, and as miserable as in those times when all was adversity and not the slightest ray of prosperity gleamed upon her. She repaired to the prison as soon as the gates were open: Gustavus had not been. She went to Mr. Wardour, who accompanied her to the Messrs. Cartwright; and there was now a doubt whether Mr. Barrington could be released without the production of the lost deed, and whether an affidavit made by Mr. Timperley (even supposing him to be willing to make it) would suffice instead of the original deed itself. In short, fresh complications had arisen; and the matter had to be inquired into. In respect to Gustavus—as Winnifred laboured under the terrible apprehension that some evil had befallen him, Mr. Wardour gave certain information to the police detectives, with a promise of a reward if the mystery were cleared up. Thus all was done which under existing circumstances could be accomplished: but Winnifred's mind remained a prey to the utmost suspense. She communicated these new calamities to Agnes Evelyn, who in her turn reported the loss of the deed to the Hon. Mrs. Hardees; and Cicely undertook to induce her uncle Mr. Timperley to accomplish by affidavit, if required, that same object which the deed itself was calculated to have produced. But Mr. Wardour and the Messrs. Cartwright discovered that the matter



WINIFRED.

could not be thus arranged: or at least they did not for the moment see their way clearly to that result—and thus at all events a fresh delay was occasioned.

It will be remembered that Winifred had made an appointment with Roderick Dalham to meet him at her own lodgings, precisely at the hour of noon, on a very early day after their recent interview. That day was the 17th of February—the one which succeeded that day of bitter disappointment and uncertainty with Winifred and her grandsire in respect to Gustavus. Throughout this day which bore the date of the 17th, and which was the one whereon the appointment should have been kept, Winifred was so completely occupied in calling upon the legal gentlemen engaged in her grandsire's case—in visiting Agnes Evelyn to report the fresh misfortunes that had transpired—and in consoling her aged relative in the prison, that she had been utterly unable to

keep that appointment with Roderick Dalham. But she had left for him a note earnestly requesting that he would permit the date for the interview to be changed until the 21st, which would leave her three clear days to see whether Gustavus might yet make his appearance and the important deed might be forthcoming. Roderick received the note when he called at Mrs. Slater's house punctual to the moment; and he left a written reply to the effect that he was entirely in Winifred's hands—that it was for her to dictate, and that he would obey.

The three days passed; and during this interval some information was obtained by a detective officer, which, on being rapidly followed up by further inquiries, led to the belief that Gustavus Barrington and his beautiful quadroon wife had embarked for the West Indies. Winifred experienced a certain degree of relief on receiving this intelligence: it banished the apprehension which

she had previously more or less entertained to the effect that her cousin might have been rendered the victim of foul play in the metropolis: it proved that he was alive;—and indeed the circumstance seemed all the more probable from the account which he himself had given Winifred of his wife's jealous and self-willed disposition. Taking it for granted, therefore, that Gustavus had been compelled by Emily to embark with such exceeding abruptness, and that in the hurry of his departure he had forgotten all about the deed which had been confided to him, she wrote a letter addressed to Gustavus, at Mr. Pinnock's abode, Mount Pleasant, near Kingston, Jamaica, beseeching him to forward the deed with the least possible delay after the receipt of that communication. In this letter Winifred did not actually reproach Gustavus for his precipitate flight and the total silence he had maintained after parting from her at her lodgings: but she represented the uneasiness she had experienced and which had been shared with her grandsire—she spoke likewise of the delay occasioned in the emancipation of the old man for want of that important document.

And now came the moment when Winifred Barrington and Roderick Dalham were again to meet. It was noon on the 21st of February; and once more was Roderick punctual. Winifred—always neat and tasteful in her attire—had now perhaps taken some little extra pains with her toilet, as any young lady might do when expecting a visitor, and particularly when the business of the interview was of the importance which might now be attached to it. At first when Roderick Dalham was conducted by Mrs. Slater into Winifred's sitting-room, the colour mantled upon the young lady's countenance—then her cheeks became very pale—and thus for a few instants she seemed to be embarrassed and confused, until by an effort she regained an outward air of composure. But now her cheeks continued pale: yet very interesting did she seem; and it was with the most unfeigned admiration that Roderick Dalham caught himself gazing upon her. For he, the man of the world, loved Winifred—yes, he loved her!—and for no selfish reason was it that he had first thought of making her his bride. His mind was constituted with the experiences of forty years—for this was his age: he had been wild too in his time—he had seen much of life—he was not a man lightly to be hurried onward by any mere romantic whim or caprice—and therefore the love of such an individual was based upon the most solid foundation. It was not a love that had been speedily formed: it had grown upon him. The more he had become acquainted with Winifred's good qualities, the greater was the impression they had made upon his mind; and when he had seen her crushed down by the weight of calamities, it had appeared sweet to him to raise her up—to save her from being trampled completely under foot—that she might thenceforth cling to him as a defender and protector. And thus, having saved the life of Winifred, it was no wonder if Roderick Dalham should regard her as a being indescribably more dear to him than she previously was—that he should feel as if heaven, after having suffered circumstances to create so wide a gulf between the two families, should decide upon ultimately bridg-

ing the abyss and uniting those families in the persons of these two scions thereof! And then too, looking at the whole matter in a more worldly point of view, it was veritably to Roderick Dalham's interest to espouse Winifred, as each day the chances multiplied in favour of the gain of her grandsire's law-suit:—and thus, although Roderick Dalham's love had from the moment of its inception in his heart been high above all selfish considerations, yet it could not be otherwise than strengthened when circumstances tended in their progress more and more to convince him of the expediency of linking his destinies with those of Winifred Barrington.

The reader has now obtained a deeper insight than he before possessed into the mind of Roderick Dalham: and the feelings with which this individual repaired to his appointment with Winifred may be imagined. He knew that it was to be an interview of importance: he felt a presentiment that circumstances had led her to some fixed and positive decision in reference to the topic which at their previous meeting he had ventured to revive; and in a word, he said to himself as he entered into Winifred's presence, "Within this hour something must ensue of the utmost importance to myself! Perhaps I may be forced to adopt the resolve of never beholding Winifred again!—perhaps on the other hand I may learn from her lips that she has decided upon giving me a legal right to become her defender and protector!"

We have already noticed the perturbation of Winifred's feelings when Roderick was introduced to the little sitting-apartment where she received him; but recovering her self-possession, she said, "You have heard from Mr. Wardour how cruelly distressed and anxious I have been on account of my cousin: you are not therefore in ignorance of the reason which impelled me to beg the postponement of our meeting for three days?"

"Yes, Winifred," answered Roderick; "Mr. Wardour has given me some few details upon the subject; and Oh! you know not how afflicted I was when I learnt that you were thus experiencing fresh misfortunes!"

"Alas, Mr. Dalham!" responded Winifred, "I sometimes think that I was born for a career of sorrow: but that idea would be an outrage to the deity himself!"

"Oh, yes, Winifred!" exclaimed Mr. Dalham; "pray be more hopeful! You are so young that it is doubly, doubly painful to hear such language come from your lips! Ah, Winifred! if it depended upon myself—if I were the guardian of your happiness——"

"Listen to me, Mr. Dalham," she said. "When I gave you the appointment the other day, it was with the fervid hope at the time that the emancipation of my grandsire was imminent; and that thus the first step would have been taken towards reinstating him in his former position of prosperity in the world. And then I should have besought you to seek his presence—to throw yourself at his feet—to proclaim how you had saved my life when I stood in the dock of a criminal tribunal!—and—and, Mr. Dalham, if you had succeeded in disarming my grandfather of his rancour towards you—then—then," continued Winifred, hesitating and blushing, "you might have asked or demanded his assent——"

"And you would have permitted me, Winifred?" exclaimed Dalham, starting up from his chair, approaching the young lady, taking her hand, and looking her earnestly in the countenance. "Oh! is it possible that I hear aright?"

"Yes, Mr. Dalham," she answered, with a blush upon her cheeks, and yet raising her looks with the most ingenuous frankness and candour: "I should have given an affirmative to all that you had asked of me! And perhaps, in the first flush of happiness at being released from that dreadful prison, and with a soul expanding when freed from the narrow limits of that space within which for years all its ideas have been concentrated,—I thought, I say, that under such circumstances my grandfather would suddenly become magnanimous and generous and forgiving. But now, alas——"

"Oh, Winifred! you have given me to understand," cried Dalham, "that it was not impossible for you to espouse me!"

"How could I persist in a refusal," asked Winifred, "in the presence of all circumstances which urge me to give an assent? Do I not owe you my life? and ought it not therefore to be at your disposal?—yes, and all the ideas, the thoughts, the sentiments, and the circumstances which belong unto it! Therefore, Mr. Dalham, when you told me that your fortune may perhaps soon depend on my grandfather and myself——"

"Tell me, Winifred," exclaimed Roderick Dalham,—"tell me, I beseech you, what would have been your decision if I had kept that appointment which you gave me upwards of two months back? You remember—when we met in Aldersgate Street—it was on the sixth of December——"

"That decision, Mr. Dalham," replied Winifred, now bending down her looks, "would have been given in accordance with the sense of the deep, deep gratitude I owe you!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Roderick, "I was mad not to keep that appointment! But you know the considerations which held me back! And now, Winifred——"

"Listen to me for a moment," she said. "My grandfather must remain in prison yet awhile, until my thoughtless cousin remits the deed which he has doubtless taken with him across the Atlantic—or until the ingenuity of lawyers shall devise a means for dispensing with the document. But so long as my grandfather remains within the limits of that gaol—so long as the high ranges of wall fling their shades upon his soul——"

"It will be useless for me to hope," said Dalham, mournfully, "that by throwing myself at his feet——"

"Oh, useless! useless!" said Winifred, for a moment wringing her hands in desperation at the thought. "So long as he remains *there*, will he continue implacable in his rancours—inexorable in his resolves—ready to spurn or to curse or to trample upon every one who may thwart or irritate him!"

"And thus, Winifred," said Dalham, "you fear——"

"Listen to me!" she repeated, but not impatiently: "pray listen to me! Of my grandsire I have said enough: but to sum up all in one word, it were useless, Mr. Dalham, to hope that he will prove within the walls of a gaol that which he might become when breathing the air of

liberty. The difference is that of the bird pining and chafing in its cage, and that of the one which being at liberty has the whole firmament for the play of its wings! Enough therefore concerning my grandfere. Now answer me! From what Mr. Wardour has told you concerning the lawsuit——"

"I will speak frankly," interjected Dalham: "from all that Mr. Wardour last told me, I feel convinced that your grandfather must win it!"

"And this is your conviction?" said Winifred, looking Roderick earnestly in the face.

"Yes," he rejoined: "your grandfather and you, Winifred, will soon be very very rich!"

"And your father and yourself, Mr. Dalham?" she asked, as if for a moment she were exulting in the knowledge of what the reply would be: "your father and yourself, I repeat——"

"We stand the chance of being impoverished and beggared! All this you know, Winifred! Surely, surely, you cannot be gloating over the anticipation of our fallen condition?"

It was a veritable cry of mental anguish—sharp, quick, and piercing—which thrilled from Winifred's lips at this accusation smote her.

"Good heavens, Mr. Dalham!" she exclaimed, "can you believe that I am capable of such monstrous ingratitude? Oh! when did you behold in me ought to justify the belief that I could thus prove an ingrate for the immensity of the bounties which I have received at your hands?"

"Pardon me, Winifred! pardon me!" cried Dalham: and now he passed his arm around her waist—and she did not immediately withdraw her symmetrical form from that pressure. "But why, my dear young friend—why, my beloved Winifred—for beloved thou art!—why put to me all those questions?"

"Oh, Mr. Dalham!" she exclaimed, "think you that if you were certain that your father would gain the lawsuit, and that you therefore would continue to be rich at his death, while my grandsire and I should continue to be poor,—think you, I ask, that under such circumstances I would say to you, *'My decision is adopted; I will accompany you to the altar'*?—No! for then you might deem that Winifred Barrington was selfishly consulting her own interests. But now, Mr. Dalham, that you have admitted that you yourself may become poor, while on the other hand I may become rich——"

"Winifred, I comprehend you!" exclaimed Roderick: and winding his arms about her neck, he strained her to his breast.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MOUNT PLEASANT AGAIN.

WHEN Gustavus Barrington returned to consciousness on board the ship, his beautiful quadroon wife was there to lavish her blandishments upon him—to overwhelm him with caresses—to clasp him in her warm glowing arms—to pillow his head upon her heaving bosom—and to stifle with kisses the remainder of the half-put questions to which she chose not to reply. Awakening from a long lethargy to find himself under the influence of those eyen

smiles, Gustavus was not very likely to prove infuriate with anger; although on the other hand he could not help giving vent to a certain degree of lamentation at having been thus hurried from the metropolis without paying a visit to his grandfather or bidding farewell to his cousin. We should observe that he could not suppose the champagne which he had imbibed at dinner-time and afterwards, had been drugged, inasmuch as he had partaken of quite a sufficient quantity to account for his being in a completely inebriate condition and thereby deprived of consciousness.

"Oh! why, why, Emily," he asked, when she would at length suffer him to speak, "have you carried me off thus?"

"The vessel was ready to clear out," responded Emily, in her softest tones: "and I thought that——"

"But why this particular vessel?" asked Gustavus.

"Did I not tell you that we must go in a ship belonging to Mr. Millard—my uncle's correspondent——"

"I do not remember your saying anything on the subject, Emily."

"Oh, but I did!" she exclaimed, still lavishing her blandishments upon him. "And then too, my dear Gus, I was afraid that illness was seizing upon you—you remember those fits of drowsiness—they alarmed me—the medical man, whom I called in, said that you would not be better until your constitution should be reinvigorated by the fresh breezes of the ocean——"

"Ah, Emily!" murmured Gustavus, "I feel—Oh! I feel, that I have behaved infamously—vilely—to that poor old man and to my cousin——"

"Not so, Gustavus!" interrupted the quadroon; "for it was not your fault that you could not go to visit them—you were very, very ill throughout the day! I did all that I could under existing circumstances——"

"Ah! I remember, you told me," said Gustavus, "you sent the deed to my grandsire—and affectionate messages——"

"To both him and your cousin," rejoined the quadroon quickly. "Now, be not unhappy dearest Gustavus!—we are on our way back to the happy island where we first met! There shall all possible felicity await us. You know my uncle's kind disposition—he will welcome you as well as myself with open arms—he knows that we are married—I have written to assure him that you are all kindness and affection towards me, and that you have so fully atoned for the cruel abruptness of your departure from Jamaica, that the subject ought never to be alluded to again. Yee—all this have I told my uncle; so that he will receive you with open arms—and he will lavish his wealth upon you—and everything that may contribute to render your life a blissful one will be within your reach!"

It was in this manner that the quadroon addressed herself to Gustavus, throwing all the most melting music of her tones into her language, and lavishing upon him the tenderest caresses. Weak-minded as he had become with regard to her—influenced with her beauty, and afraid of her temper—a slave to her fascinations, and frightened to raise a storm of passion which he knew to be

by no means easy to still—Gustavus soon ceased to complain of the circumstances of his abrupt departure; so that instead of continuing to revert his looks towards his native land, he sent them travelling across the Atlantic to the island which was now his destination and which he had no doubt would prove the place of his residence for the greater portion, if not the whole, of his life. He conjured up all those circumstances which were best calculated to make him forget England, his grandsire, and Winifred: he thought of his splendid wife—of the luxurious isle to which he was going—of the wealth which he knew would be at his command—of his future prospects when Mr. Pinnock should die—and he said to himself, "Truly, I ought to be happy and contented!"

The voyage was a long one; for the weather was most inauspicious during the greater portion of the passage—and thus eleven weeks elapsed from the day that the ship left the Thames until that on which it entered Kingston harbour. But at last the destination was reached in safety; and it was almost with a feeling of wonderment at finding himself there again, that Gustavus disembarked on the spot whence he had so frantically leapt on board the mail-packet that was bound for England about six months back. But as for the quadroon—Oh! was not she delighted thus again to set foot upon her native land—to be about to return to the home of her birth—and to be accompanied by him whom she loved so passionately—for whom she had undertaken, endured, and done so much!

It was past five o'clock in the evening when Gustavus and his quadroon wife landed at Kingston: they therefore knew that Mr. Pinnock would have by this time left his office and proceeded to his suburban home. Thither they at once proceeded in a hired vehicle; and the moment it rolled up to the front of the verandah, the casements of which stood open as usual in the warm season of the year (for it was the beginning of the month of May) Mr. Pinnock himself came rushing forth, with joy depicted on his countenance. And then what a happy meeting it was! The worthy merchant hugged and embraced Emily and her husband one after the other again and again, and then both together. The quadroon's heart was swelling with triumph: while Gustavus himself experienced all the bliss of the moment; for he felt like a wanderer who had returned to his home—and he had not a regretful or disagreeable thought for England on that occasion.

And now how much there was to talk about! and what a multitude of questions did Mr. Pinnock ask! But Emily managed him with the utmost skill and adroitness: she said everything that was calculated to be agreeable—she suppressed everything that might prove disagreeable; and thus, for instance, not a syllable was spoken in reference to the box of gold—the recovery of which, be it remembered, and its transmission to England, had never been revealed to Mr. Pinnock. But if Emily thus studied, as heretofore, to shield herself and to keep the merchant in the dark in respect to the fact of her having been the veritable thief of the gold dust—she likewise did her best to make the character of Gustavus appear in the most amiable light to Mr. Pinnock. Thus, while excluding the topic of his abrupt departure from

Jamaica, she nevertheless made such allusions to the misfortunes which had been experienced by his cousin Winifred as almost completely to justify that abrupt departure: and then by lavishing caresses upon Gustavus, she made her uncle—or her father, as we ought to call him—understand that she was devotedly attached to her husband, and that she bespoke all the most affectionate and friendly consideration on his behalf. Mr. Pinnock was not disposed to look too deeply into past matters: he was glad that his daughter had returned to him—glad also that she had succeeded in bringing back the truant—glad to have a companion again to sit with him of an evening while he smoked his cigar and drank his wine.

The tidings quickly spread that the beautiful quadroom had returned—not as Miss Pinnock, but as Mrs. Barrington; and visits of congratulation were speedily paid at Mount Pleasant. The Thurlows and the Adairs—who had been present on the memorable bridal day when everything was strangely cut short by the flight and disappearance of Gustavus—were now amongst the first to pay their respects to the wedded pair on their return from England. The fact that Emily had gone alone in search of her fugitive lover—that she had found him, married him, and brought him back—gave a most romantic interest to the return of the young couple to Mount Pleasant; and Mr. Pinnock celebrated the event with a series of entertainments, banquets, and festivities—at which all his friends and acquaintances were invited to attend.

When all these rejoicings were over and Mount Pleasant had relapsed into its wonted tranquillity, it almost seemed to Gustavus as if his voyage to Europe had been but a vision, and as if all the incidents of his sojourn there were but mere phantasmagorean details of the same dream; while Emily joyously hugged the belief that having brought the truant safely home, he was settled there for the remainder of his days, and that with the wide ocean rolling betwixt himself and his relatives, their images would pale in the distance and his yearnings towards them would dwindle and sink into complete extinction. Thoroughly acquainted with the human heart, the quadroom had gained immensely by her own visit to Europe; her experiences during her absence of those few months had amounted to what might have been under other circumstances the inculcations of years. She now no longer perceived a necessity to play the tyrant towards her husband; for she knew that he could not now escape from her so easily as when in those far-off climes across the Atlantic. She therefore relaxed the bonds which she had cast around him: or rather he should say that in their place she substituted silken trammels, which by her art she rendered alike impalpable and invisible. Instead of constantly following him—constantly keeping with him—constantly rendering herself his companion, she seemed to allow him all the license of a husband and a man of free and independent spirit; though secretly assured was she that her fascinations and her wiles had cast upon him a spell which was sure to bring him back to her arms. She curbed the impetuosity of her temper; she seemed loving and kind, affectionate and devoted—without suffering the demonstrations of her love to run to

the extreme of maudlin sentimentalism; and yet she so well plied her blandishments on proper occasions, as to leave their influence upon his imagination and upon his senses, if not actually upon his heart.

Now, the truth is that the quadroom fully comprehended one fact; and this was that she had a hold upon Gustavus rather through the medium of the sense than of the sentiment. In plainer terms, she was aware that she scarcely possessed his love in the pure ethereal meaning of the sentiment: it was on his part a passion the fires of which had to be constantly fed. But who more fit to sustain this ardour than a being who was herself all warm, glowing, and fervid? She had a lurking dread in her mind that it was Winifred who had possessed his heart—that she was the only being he had ever truly and really loved—and that the only chance for herself was by this love for another becoming absorbed in the intensity of the passion which she by her arts and blandishments could ever manage to sustain.

When the whirl of pleasure attendant upon the festivities at Mount Pleasant was over, Mr. Pinnock and Gustavus had a little conversation together on business-matters.

"I wish, my dear Gustavus," said the planter, "to place you in a position of independence. You know that Emily is not my niece, but that she is my own daughter; and you therefore are now regarded by me as a son. At my death you and Emily will inherit all I possess. Meanwhile it were just as well that you should have some little occupation, even though it be more nominal than real. To you therefore be assigned the duty of superintending my estate, while I attend to the affairs of my counting-house. Take five hundred a year by way of pocket-money—keep your horses—purchase your chaise, or little turn-out of some kind or another—consider the house your own—issue what invitations you please—and bring any friends you like to sit down at the table."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Pinnock thrust into the youth's hands a roll of bank-notes amounting to a considerable sum; and then he hurried away to escape the thanks which his son-in-law was pouring forth. This conduct on the part of the merchant was full well calculated to assist Emily in her constant study to abstract the young man's thoughts from his transatlantic native land, and rivet them upon the island-home of his present adoption. Yet Mr. Pinnock knew not that any artifice was at all necessary for the purpose; he fancied that the heart of his son-in-law was entirely devoted to his daughter; and therefore his liberal treatment of the young man was only the spontaneous effusion of a naturally generous disposition.

Gustavus endeavoured to render himself as happy as possible; and he certainly had almost every reason to be happy: for he had a comfortable home, a superbly handsome wife, horses and equipage, the command of money, every luxury that could be desired, and just sufficient occupation upon the estate to while away the few hours that might otherwise be tedious. But then there were moments when the thought of his grandsire and his cousin would steal into his brain,—coming as if it were an ice-wind to chill the glowing ideas that were otherwise engendered by all the circumstances

of his position in that fervid clime. Often and often, to banish the image of Winifred, would he fix his gaze upon Emily—he would look into the depths of her lustrous dark eyes—he would send his regards wandering over the rich contours of her superb form—and he would strive to persuade himself that *she only* ruled in the domain of his heart. But in this endeavour he was not always successful; and then he would mount his steed and gallop away at almost a furious rate, as if to outstrip his thoughts.

We should observe that Emily now practised all the elegances and graces of the toilet. When in Paris, she had studied French fashions; and she had brought with her thence a stock of raiment, the beauty of which excited the envy of many of her female friends, and certainly gave additional charms to her own naturally handsome person. Thus, it was no longer the quadron girl roaming in the simplest *negligée* about the domain—slipping off her shoes at any moment to bathe her well-modelled feet in the purling streamlet—and only occasionally dressing herself in finer apparel to pay a visit to Kingston: it was not the Emily of other days whom Gustavus now beheld; but it was an elegant lady, who with the marvellous aptitude of her mind had caught the fastidiousness of European fashions, and studied them as much at Mount Pleasant as when they were together beneath the meridian of Paris. Sometimes Gustavus fancied that he would rather it should still be the Emily whom he had first known,—wandering by his side in the lightest possible drapery—a *negligée* so complete as to amount almost to a voluptuous untidiness: but at other times he thought that he liked her best as she now was,—her charms modelled to the compression of a corset—an elegant bonnet displacing the large straw hat—and the flowing skirt of her robe affording but transient glimpses of the shapely feet and the delicately-rounded ankles.

Two months elapsed after the return of the quadron and her husband to Jamaica. Gustavus never received the letter which Winifred wrote him requesting the return of the document; and we will explain how it was intercepted. It had suited Emily's views to perform the voyage in a sailing-ship, because that ship had cleared out from London, where they were at the time—and because it belonged to her father's correspondent, Mr. Millard, so that for this reason she had been enabled to induce the captain, by means of a well-devised tale, to enter into her project of carrying off her husband, in the manner already described. That voyage, as we have seen, was protracted to a period of nearly three months. But long previous to the arrival of the young married couple in Jamaica, Winifred's letter had reached its destination and had been delivered at Mount Pleasant; inasmuch as it had been conveyed by the mail steampacket. Mr. Pincock, having received it, kept it against the return of Gustavus; for he already knew, by letters from Emily, that they were married and would in a short time revisit Mount Pleasant. When they did arrive there, she fortunately (at least as she considered it) got hold of the letter; and it was not difficult for a young lady gifted with her powers of artifice, to devise some pretext for inducing Mr. Pincock to abstain from mentioning the fact of that letter's arrival in

the presence of Gustavus. Emily perused the letter, and then destroyed it.

But that letter increased her previous vexation at the circumstance connected with the document; she was thereby more than ever made aware of its importance to old Mr. Barrington. We have already hinted that Emily was not naturally bad-hearted: she would not for a moment travel out of her way to do an injury to a fellow-creature. It was only her intense selfishness—her all-absorbing egotism—that made her trample upon every other consideration when her own interests were at stake. But she was now rendered alive to the necessity of forwarding that document to her husband's grandfather. It however often happens in this world that circumstances conspire to prevent the accomplishment of the simplest actions, and that those persons who would not delay a moment in despatching serious affairs, suffer themselves to fall into a lamentable procrastination in reference to matters of more trivial import. Thus, first of all, the rejoicings and festivities at Mount Pleasant engaged Emily's attention; and then, when not accompanying her husband in any of his visits or excursions, she remained at Mount Pleasant to be on the spot for the moment of his return. Frequently she quite forgot all about the document; then on recollecting it, she would vow that the morrow should positively see its transmission to the post: but when the morrow came, something would occur to frustrate her intent—and so it remained where it was, in a truck of which she kept the key. One of the chief reasons for this delay was that she purposed to convey the packet with her own hand to the post in Kingston; for she was afraid to trust it to any menial of the household, lest it should meet the eye of Gustavus, and he should question her concerning the motive for which she corresponded with his grandfater. Now, as she only went into Kingston when he accompanied her, she had to create a special occasion for going alone to acquit herself of the as yet unperformed duty: but day after day went by without seeing the matter accomplished; and thus at the end of two months after the return of the young couple to Mount Pleasant, the sealed packet was still in the trunk, and the imploring request contained in poor Winifred's letter remained unfulfilled.

Gustavus had not forgotten Mr. Hargrave. By means of an inquiry which seemed quite casually put, he had elicited from Mr. Pincock that the misanthrope was still on the island—still living at the same secluded cottage as before—but that for some months past Mr. Pincock had seen very little of him. It further appeared, however, that on one occasion Mr. Hargrave had stopped Mr. Pincock to ask if he had heard anything of Gustavus; and the planter in reply had told him that he had recently received letters from Emily in Europe, to the effect that the young couple were married and would in course of time return to Jamaica.

But Gustavus did not wish to meet Mr. Hargrave. He somehow or another dreaded the caustic severity and cynical irony of that gentleman. He knew that the misanthrope had all along discountenanced his marriage with Emily; and there was a secret voice in the youth's soul which told him that Mr. Hargrave had not altogether

spoken in a manner inconsistent with a far-seeing shrewdness when he had said that such a marriage was not calculated to ensure his happiness. Besides, Gustavus feared that Mr. Hargrave would question him with respect to his relations in England, and inquire the effect of the letter sent to old Mr. Barrington in reference to Mr. Timperley;—and the youth did not like to incur the risk of being catechised on a topic that was a sore one. Indeed, as he strove hard to banish his relations from his memory, he naturally avoided any circumstance that might lead to conjure up their images with vividness.

One day, however—at the expiration of two months after the return to Mount Pleasant—Gustavus, after rambling on foot through a portion of his father-in-law's domains, turned into the road leading towards the sea-side; and being overcome by the heat, he threw himself upon the strand. He did not immediately notice the fact which we are about to explain; for he was thinking of other matters: but gradually the recollection dawned in unto his mind that this was the very same spot where he had dragged ashore the corpse of the old miser Elverstone,—an incident which had subsequently put him in possession of the gold that had proved the fruitful source of so many after-occurrences. While he was gazing upon the sea—calm and shining as a lake of quicksilver—and reflecting how it had there thrown up the corpse of the perished miser, he thought he heard a foot-step behind him: he looked round with a sort of presentiment start; and there was Mr. Hargrave. Yes—there was the misanthrope,—looking exactly as when Gustavus had last seen him some months back,—dressed in shabby costume, his toilet displaying a negligence amounting almost to slovenliness. There was the same expression of countenance—the profound melancholy blended with a certain degree of bitterness and vacancy. The tall thin form was drawn up to its full height: the large black eyes shone brightly; and as Gustavus, springing up to his feet, bowed, and then stood abashed and confused, a smile of withering irony curled the misanthrope's lips, revealing that handsome set of teeth which we have before noticed.

With no word of greeting—with no salutation to denote that they now met after a long interval of separation—Mr. Hargrave abruptly said, “You are looking upon the sea which gave up the corpse of the miser—the corpse yielded the gold—the gold produced certain complications, more or less serious according to the view which different minds may take of them. May I hope that this same gold has since proved less fatal in its effects in another country?”

“Yes,” replied Gustavus, “the gold has for some time past been in the possession of——” he gasped for a moment, and then added—“of my cousin Winifred.”

“I read the whole account of your cousin Winifred's trial in the newspapers,” said Mr. Hargrave. “She was acquitted—and that must have occurred before you reached England.”

“Yes,” replied Gustavus. “And now may I inquire how your health has been since last I saw you?”

“Fehaw!” ejaculated the misanthrope; “as if my health were of the slightest consequence to

anybody!”—and he smiled ironically, for he comprehended that the query on young Barrington's part was nothing but an excuse in order to turn the conversation away from a disagreeable topic. “And now tell me,—you who are acquainted with your cousin, and have been upon the spot,—tell me, I say, for you can judge infinitely better than any one who is unacquainted with your cousin, and who has not been upon the spot to hear what people say of the case,—tell me, I repeat, was she really innocent, and was the verdict a just one? or was she really guilty, and was the verdict delivered in mercy?”

“What! Winifred guilty?” exclaimed Gustavus, suddenly inspired with a chivalrous heroism on his cousin's behalf: “the bare idea is preposterous! No, Mr. Hargrave!—you or I, while here upon this island, were as likely to have been the murderers of that old woman in England as my cousin Winifred! And Oh, Mr. Hargrave! if you knew the amount of sympathy of which she became the object——”

“I am rejoiced to hear you tell me all this,” interrupted the misanthrope; “because it only confirms the conviction which was strong in my own mind—namely, that your cousin was really innocent. But now let me ask you a question, Why did you not marry your cousin?—since it was for her sake that you ran away so precipitately from Jamaica—or at least such was the rumour which prevailed at the time.”

“Marry her, Mr. Hargrave?” gasped Gustavus. “Why—what made you think—why should you have supposed that I entertained any particular regard——”

“Why, did not you yourself speak to me of your cousin Winifred and your old grandfather?” exclaimed Mr. Hargrave: “and think you that I am so ignorant of the world and of the human heart as to have been unable to penetrate what was passing in your thoughts at the time when you thus spoke to me of Winifred? Answer me therefore——”

“No, no, Mr. Hargrave! I will not discuss this topic!” ejaculated Gustavus, evidently wincing from the theme, and almost writhing beneath the influence of his own thoughts.

“Just as you like,” said Mr. Hargrave coldly. “I have no impertinent curiosity: I had for some reason or another—I scarcely know what—conceived an interest in your welfare; and therefore——But no matter! I can fathom all the truth without the aid of any explanation from your lips.”

“Indeed, Mr. Hargrave?” and young Barrington looked anxiously and nervously into the misanthrope's face.

“To be sure!” cried Hargrave. “I should be a veritable idiot if I could not fathom it all! The planter's quadroon daughter followed you over to England—she was strong in will and resolute in purpose—you were proportionately weak and feeble—and thus Winifred was sacrificed to Emily—and perhaps your heart's happiness has formed part of that sacrifice. There, Gustavus!—is that the truth? or is it not?”

An expression of anguish for a moment flitted over the youth's countenance, as he recollected the terrible scenes which occurred on that memorable day when Emily and Winifred stood face to face

and when the latter surrendered up to the former whatsoever claim she might have to his heart.

"Young man, you are not happy," said Mr. Hargrave, looking earnestly upon Barrington's countenance; "and I am really sorry for it. Yes—I am really sorry for it!—although it is more or less all your own fault. But now tell me,—that letter which I gave to you at the instant when you rushed upon the deck of the mail-
pocket—"

"Ah, Mr. Hargrave!" exclaimed Gustavus, "how great a debt of gratitude is due to you from my grandfather for having opened his eyes to the true character of that man Timperley!"

"Ah! then," said the misanthrope, "the warning was not neglected?"

"Oh, no!" cried Gustavus: "my grandfather, previously so much prejudiced in favour of Mr. Timperley, was all in a moment convinced that for years and years that vile bad man had been playing him false!"

"I am glad that my letter produced this result," said Hargrave; "for a greater scoundrel than Mr. Timperley does not exist on the face of the earth! But is your grandfather still in prison? No! that can scarcely be, considering the vast amount which the gold dust must have realized?"

"My grandfather was still in prison when I left England," replied Gustavus: "but there can be no doubt that he obtained his liberation almost immediately after—"

"And you waited not to hail his restoration to freedom!" exclaimed Hargrave, evidently thinking there was something strange in this part of the business.

"No—I could not wait—that is to say I desired to, as is duty bound—but—but—"

"I understand all about it," interrupted Hargrave curtly; "your wife would not let you stop. Well, but why was not your grandfather restored to freedom? Could he not get quit of Timperley?"

"Oh, yes—I believe so!" rejoined Gustavus. "Indeed, I have every reason to imagine that was the case; for just before I left England, Mr. Timperley had surrendered up a deed of paramount importance—the very document, in fact, which proved the great barrier to my grandsire's emancipation, and without the production or destruction of which the money itself was of no avail in the settlement of his debts."

"Well—and this deed being produced," said Mr. Hargrave, who felt convinced by the hesitation of the youth's manner and the confusion of his looks that there was something wrong,—“how was it that the door of the gaol was not at once thrown open? and how was it that you did not wait an hour or two to welcome your venerable relative into a state of freedom once again?"

At this moment Gustavus was carried away by such an overwhelming tide of feelings that he burst into tears: then dreadfully ashamed of himself, and even alarmed at this display of his weakness, he hastened to say, "Let us turn the discourse, Mr. Hargrave! Pray do not press me on this topic!"

"My young friend," said the misanthrope, his look and manner all in a moment becoming pecu-

liarily kind and friendly—we might almost say affectionate,—“there is grief in your heart! You have either done something wrong, or something wrong has been done to you. Tell me everything. Yes, Gustavus—I experience a real interest in you! Tell me therefore everything!"

The youth now felt in one of those moods which prompt and incline individuals to speak confidentially to those who address them in a sympathizing manner; and he accordingly began to let out a few of the details of his own conduct towards Winifred when first arriving in London. Mr. Hargrave questioned him; and at length he elicited the entire history of all that had occurred after the quadron had presented herself at Winifred's lodgings,—how the box of gold was by her obtained from the railway-station,—how Winifred surrendered up her claim to the hand of Gustavus—how Emily bore him away in triumph—how the gold was restored to Winifred—and how Gustavus then became the quadron's husband. But still Mr. Hargrave questioned him further; and thus the misanthrope wormed out of the youth all that remained to be told—the sojourn in Paris—the return to London—the youth's last interview with Winifred—the circumstance of the document being entrusted to him—his encounter with his wife—their return to the hotel—the manner in which that day was passed—and the mysterious abruptness with which he was kidnapped, so to speak, on board the ship which had borne him back to Jamaica.

Mr. Hargrave gazed with astonishment upon Gustavus when the whole story was told: he then reflected profoundly for nearly a minute—and at length he said, "It is a painful history to be heard by any one who is interested in you, Gustavus; and it must be a painful history for you to tell!"

The youth looked abashed: he held down his head and said nothing.

"Are you sure," inquired Mr. Hargrave, after a pause, "that your Emily played a fair game in respect to that document?"

"Good heavens, let us hope so!" exclaimed Gustavus. "But of course she did! What earthly interest could she have had to the contrary?"

"I don't know. Very likely none," replied Mr. Hargrave curtly. "But who could tell? All I can say is, that if I were exactly in your position, I should not leave the matter in any uncertainty: I should consider it a duty towards an aged and long persecuted grandsire to convince myself that no barrier existed against his liberation."

"Yes—you are right, Mr. Hargrave!" said Gustavus. "I ought to have written—"

"What! you have been two whole months in the island, and not written to England yet?" ejaculated the misanthrope. "Ah! your looks prove that it is so! Really, young man," he added, in a severe tone, "I cannot altogether admire your conduct towards your relatives in England. But perhaps they have written to you?"

"No," rejoined Gustavus: "I have not received any letter since my return to Mount Pleasant."

"But you tell me that your departure was so abrupt,—how do you know that your relatives are aware that you have actually returned to Jamaica?"



"Oh, Emily sent the kindest messages, at the same time that she transmitted the document."

"Ah! so she said," interjected the misanthrope bluntly: "but we must not take everything as gospel that comes from her lips. Pardon me for speaking in this manner of your wife. You will admit she deserves it. And now, Gustavus, I tell you what you must do. Go and write a letter to your cousin Winifred, beseeching a few lines by return of post to set your mind at rest relative to the emancipation of your grandfather. This is a duty you must perform; and I will see that you accomplish it. Let the letter be written without delay; and I will take it with my own hand into Kingeton—with my own eyes will I see it consigned to the post-office—and then we shall know that it has not been intercepted. Come, Gustavus, I will walk with you towards Mount Pleasant; and I will lounge in the neighbourhood until you come forth with the letter."

No. 45.—AGNES.

Towards Mount Pleasant did the misanthrope and the youth accordingly proceed; and as they drew near the house they beheld the postman advancing from the direction of Kingeton. In a few minutes that individual came up to the spot where they were just turning off towards the villa; and he said, "I beg your pardon, sir—I believe you are Mr. Barrington: and if so, there is a letter for you."

Gustavus took it; and on glancing at the handwriting of the address, he cried, "It is from Winifred!"

The postman passed rapidly on his way; and Gustavus proceeded to exclaim, "How singular—how remarkable!—that just as we had been talking of letters from England——"

"Open that letter, and see what it says," interrupted Mr. Hargrave: "you can afterwards express your admiration of the coincidence, if you think fit."

Gustavus accordingly opened the letter: but scarcely had his eyes glanced over the first line or two of its contents, when the colour forsook his cheeks—he trembled violently—and Mr. Hargrave saw that something was the matter. Gustavus, now giving vent to ejaculations of rage mingled with moans of anguish and despair, handed the letter to the misanthrope, who found that it was to the following purport:—

“Again, and perhaps for the last time, do I write to you, Gustavus. Why did my former letter remain unanswered? Surely it must have reached you! For heaven’s sake transmit me that document which I entrusted to you! Oh, delay not, Gustavus! for you *must* be distressed to learn that you—and you *only*—have for months past kept our poor grandfather in prison! Oh, Gustavus! surely this appeal will suffice! Send the deed!—you cannot possibly have destroyed it!

“WINIFRED.”

“Oh, Mr. Hargrave!” exclaimed Gustavus, clasping his hands together; “am I not accursed in this wife of mine? It is she who has done it!”

“It certainly looks as if it were so,” said the misanthrope: “but still you must not judge too hastily. There are such things as accidents—mis-carriages of parcels——”

“Oh, my poor grandfather! Oh, Winifred! Winifred!” cried Gustavus, wringing his hands: “I have proved a curse unto ye both! Mr. Hargrave, await me here for a few minutes!”

Having thus spoken, the half-distracted youth darted away and rushed into the house. He sought Emily in the parlour and drawing-room: she was not there. He rushed up-stairs—he burst into the chamber—but still he perceived her not. As he was turning to leave the room and prosecute his search elsewhere, his eye fell upon a large trunk which he now recollected that his wife invariably kept locked, and of which she retained the key. Without a moment’s hesitation he seized upon some implement that was close at hand—he broke open the box—he began to toss out its contents. Scarcely however had he any hope that the deed would there be found; and he was just on the point of desisting from his occupation, when behold! at the very bottom of that trunk he caught a glimpse of something which evoked an ejaculation from his lips. He snatched up the object,—yes, it was the deed! He remembered well that parcel, carefully sealed and tied round with a piece of ribbon!—for it was precisely in the same state as when Agnes Evelyn had laid it upon the table in Winifred’s little sitting-room.

And now it was a cry followed by a yell which burst from the lips of Gustavus—a cry of joy to find that the document had not been destroyed nor lost—but a yell of rage to think that it was his own wife who had proved the means of keeping his grandfathers in prison for months past, and of filling the heart of Winifred with so much bitter affliction. Then, with the packet in his hand, just as he had snatched it out of the box, did he run down the stairs—forth from the house—and back again to the spot where Mr. Hargrave was awaiting him.

“I have found it! I have found it!” cried the excited youth holding up the packet. “Oh, Mr. Hargrave! to think that my own wife——”

“Now be not excited, Gustavus,” interrupted the misanthrope. “You are the child of impulses; and for this very reason is it that you are wavering and vacillating, and that you never have a will of your own! Let us look at the packet. Ah! it is tied and sealed——”

“Yes,” exclaimed Gustavus,—“just as Winifred gave it me about five months ago! Oh, those five months—my poor grandfather——”

“Well, well—after all,” said the misanthrope, “they cannot matter so very much to one who has been a quarter of a century in prison. But yet not for a single day longer than was necessary ought he to have been detained!”

“No—not for a single day!—and Emily is the cause of it all! But at least let us open the packet—though perhaps there is no need, and I had better hasten off at once and either send it to England—or take it with me!” added Gustavus vehemently, while a fierce expression of anger against his quondam wife flitted over his countenance.

“Be tranquil, young man—be tranquil, I say,” exclaimed Mr. Hargrave, in a tone of authority. “There are important considerations before you: and you must pursue them with gravity and deliberation. Now you know that I am your friend. Allow me to open this packet—I will glance over the deed which it contains—and I will speedily tell you whether it be of the immense importance which you conceive. For it would be useless to excite yourself for nothing, or to run on a wild goose chase to Europe.”

“True, true!” ejaculated Gustavus. “Oh, if I had you always for a mentor!”—and now he was as glad at having fallen in with the misanthrope as he had recently been anxious to avoid him. “Commend me in all things, and I will obey you, my dear sir, as if you were my father and I were your son.”

“Then I tell you what to do, Gustavus,” said Mr. Hargrave. “Just walk as far as yonder group of trees,” he continued, indicating a clump about two hundred yards distant: “during this interval you will calm and tranquillize yourself, so that you may do nothing rashly either in respect to your wife when you next meet, or in reference to another sudden voyage to Europe. For believe me, Gustavus,” added Mr. Hargrave emphatically, and with a strange expression of countenance, “it is no light thing to flee away from one’s wife and to abandon one’s home for ever!”

The misanthrope’s voice had become ominously hollow as he spoke these last words; and for a moment Gustavus gazed upon him as if he thought that in thus speaking he was involuntarily telling a part of his own history. But the idea was only transient in the youth’s mind; and he turned away, walking slowly in the direction of the clump of trees two hundred yards distant. Mr. Hargrave remained upon the spot, and proceeded to open the packet.

But we will follow the footsteps of Gustavus. He could not compose his feelings so easily as the misanthrope had seemed to think that he might be enabled to do. The images of his grandfathers and Winifred had been within the last hour vividly re-

called to his mind: all his love for his cousin had become reawakened, mingling with a profound sympathy and compassion as well as with a deep remorse; so that by a very natural reaction of the feelings he experienced a proportionate rage against Emily for the monstrous cheat, so unaccountable to him, which she had practised in reference to that document. He was now compelled to look upon his own wife in the light of a persecutor of his relatives—that venerable grandsire and that well-beloved Winifred. It only required such a setting-in of so strong a tide of emotions as this to make him retrospect with bitterness upon all the various acts and machinations which Emily had from the first practised,—the stealing of the gold from himself, then the stealing of the gold from Winifred, her perseverance in separating him from Winifred, the tyranny she had exercised over him in Europe, the dissipations in which she had plunged him, the whole affair about the document, and the manner in which she had kidnapped him as it were on board the vessel. A burning sense of wrong was engendered in his mind; and Emily was the wrong-doer! Forgotten was her beauty: scattered to the winds were all the lingering influences of her siren wiles and voluptuous blandishments! Gustavus felt himself to be altogether a new man—an altered being—a regenerated creature.

Ten minutes elapsed before he returned to the spot where he had left Mr. Hargrave. The misanthrope was now seated upon a bank by the side of the road; one hand supported his head—the other held a document: the envelope lay upon the ground. He was plunged into the profoundest reflection,—so profound indeed, that he did not observe the youth's approach until his shadow was thrown upon the earth before him.

"Ah!" ejaculated the misanthrope; and it was with a sudden start that he thus recognised the presence of Gustavus.

"Well, my dear sir," said the youth; "that document——"

"Is of all the importance which has been attached to it," rejoined Mr. Hargrave. "I know enough of law to be aware of that!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Gustavus joyfully; "then though the release will come tardily, yet that liberation will be effected! Let me look at the deed. Ah!" he again exclaimed, as he took it from the misanthrope's hand; "it bears a far back date:"—then reading the endorsement, he said, "*Joshua Waldron* first of all—afterwards *Thomas Timperley*——"

"Yes, yes," ejaculated Mr. Hargrave, "those are the names!"—and it was almost with a fierce impatience that he snatched the document from young Barrington's hand.

"And now what am I to do, sir?" inquired Gustavus.

"As I am going to Europe immediately——"

"You, Mr. Hargrave?"

"Yes—I. By the very next packet! And ah! when I bethink me," exclaimed the misanthrope, "there is one which leaves Kingston this very day!"

"But I was not aware," said Gustavus, "of any such intention on your part——"

"Perhaps not," ejaculated the misanthrope curtly: "I am not in the habit of communicating

my intentions——But no matter!" he continued, suddenly throwing off his cynical severity and bitterness; "it is not the less true, my dear boy, that I am going to Europe; and if you permit me, I will be the bearer of this deed to your grandfather. I hope you can trust me, Gustavus?—you know that I would not for the world deceive you!"

"Oh, my dear sir!" exclaimed the youth enthusiastically, "with the exception of my relatives, you are almost the only person in the world whom I dare trust! But let me go with you!"

"No, my dear boy," rejoined Mr. Hargrave, pressing his hand with a fervour that seemed even affectionate: "it must not be! Remember that you are married——"

"Accursed marriage!"—and Gustavus etamped his foot with rage.

"Nevertheless you *are* married—and therefore henceforth you can be nothing to Winifred but a cousin, and she must be nothing else to you. It were most unkind—most imprudent—wrong in every sense—for you to throw yourself in her way; for after all you have told me, I feel confident that if you were to meet again, such meeting would only be attended with the saddest memories."

"Alas, alas! it is but too true!" said Gustavus, quivering with excitement. "But this spot has now become hateful to me—my wife likewise is hateful——"

"Gustavus, you must not speak thus!" interrupted Mr. Hargrave. "You are married—and though your wife has not behaved well to you, yet for a thousand reasons must you study to make the best of your position. Do you agree that I shall take the document with me?—and I pledge myself that the very first thing to be done by me on arriving in London, will be to deliver it into the hands of your grandsire."

"Yes, I agree," said Gustavus. "But once more——"

"Not another word!" interjected the misanthrope. "All is now understood between us. Ah! when I bethink me, do you know how this document found its way into your cousin's hands? Did she receive it direct from Mr. Timperley?"

"I do not know," answered Gustavus. "Our conversation that day when she gave it to me, was so hurried—I was in such an excited state—that if she told me any particular details, I have forgotten them: yet my impression is that she simply said it was a document which Mr. Timperley had given up. But why do you ask? Is there anything of importance connected with the mode in which it came into Winifred's hands?"

"No—nothing, nothing," answered Hargrave quickly. "It was a mere passing curiosity. And now, Gustavus, farewell! I will write to you from England; I will send you all needful tidings of your grandfather and cousin. Farewell, my dear boy!—and conduct yourself leniently and forgivingly towards your wife; for remember that she is your wife, and you cannot—you must not separate from her!"

Thus speaking, Mr. Hargrave wrung the youth's hand with fervour: he wrung it again and again; and then hurried away, taking the document with him. Barrington stood rooted to the spot like the mute effigy of despair; for he felt as if he were

losing his best friend in the retreating form of the misanthrope.

And that form was soon lost in the distance; and then Gustavus turning abruptly round, dashed his open palm against his forehead, ejaculating, "Miserable wretch that I am, I know not what to do!"

He hurried on, neither perceiving nor caring in which direction he went—but borne as it were by the wild tornado of his thoughts, as a balloon in the air is hurried through the expanse on the wild wing of the whirlwind. Thus he sped on for nearly half-an hour, despair and madness in his brain,—until he suddenly stopped short on the brink of a precipice, down which another forward footstep would have precipitated him. He started back, an ejaculation of horror bursting from his lips as he abruptly became vividly alive to the awful peril which he had just escaped. But as he glanced around, he beheld a female form at a little distance; and now another ejaculation was evoked from his tongue.

"Ah, Emily!"—it was thus that he exclaimed.

"Dearest Gus!" cried the quadroon, bounding towards him: "I have been looking for you! You did not come in to luncheon—I was alarmed—But good heavens, Gustavus! what is the matter with you?—why do you regard me thus?"

"Keep back, Emily!" he exclaimed, with a sinister fierceness in his regards as well as in his tone; "or by heaven, I shall do you a mischief!"

And the quadroon did step back; for there was something fearful in her young husband's aspect. She was elegantly dressed, and had looked wondrously handsome until the moment when a sallow paleness seized upon her countenance on beholding those terrible looks.

"Gustavus!" she exclaimed, "for heaven's sake——"

"Emily, keep back, I tell you! Depart hence!" his voice actually thundered; "or I shall do you a mischief! Look! this precipice is deep—the sea rolls at the bottom——"

"My God! he has gone mad!"—and Emily clasped her hands in horror.

"Mad?—yes, mad!" echoed Gustavus fiercely. "Wretch that you are! what has made you the bitter, bitter persecutor of my relations?"

"Ah!"—and the quadroon's face became as deadly pale as the duskiest of her complexion would permit; and it was a hideous pallor which overspread that brunette richness of the skin; for her guilty conscience suddenly smote her, and a suspicion in reference to the document flashed wildly and horribly into her brain.

"Yes—I see that you comprehend my meaning!" exclaimed Gustavus. "My God! why did you do it?—why did you deceive me so infamously? There has been a letter from my cousin——"

"A letter?" repeated Emily in affright.

"Yes—a letter that never reached me! It was intercepted doubtless? Perhaps you know how!"

"Oh! pardon me, Gustavus—pardon me, I beseech!"—and again the quadroon's hands were clasped with even a mortal agony.

"Ah! then you confess it—and I could almost kill you!" he cried, in terrible accents. "But another letter has come—it has just reached my hands——"

"Another letter? Oh, Gustavus!" exclaimed Emily, "the document is safe—you shall have it——"

"I have already got it!" he ejaculated, in accents of the wildest scorn. "I found it in your box—and I have entrusted it to one who will not deceive me!"

"Listen to me, Gustavus—listen to me for God's sake! and I will explain everything! For, Oh! I have been very, very wretched on account of that document!—it has haunted me like a remorse! Yet I take heaven to witness, Gustavus, that it all arose from the immense love which I bear you——"

"Oh, talk not to me of love!" he cried, in a voice fearfully mocking and ironical. "Tell me of your hatred—and I shall believe you! Tell me that this hatred of yours has poured forth its vials not only against myself, but likewise against my unoffending relatives. Yes—tell me of your hatred, Emily——"

"My hatred?" she shrieked forth in wildest dismay. "Oh, no! no! Say anything to me rather than that! Oh, my God! I love you, Gustavus—I love you!"—and the quadroon bounding forward, flung her arms about his neck.

"Keep off! keep off, I say!" he vociferated, violently pushing her away from him. "As soon as a serpent to enfold me in its coils, as you in your arms!"

"No, no—I will not be spurned! I love you!—madly, passionately love you!—and you shall forgive me!"

"Never!" exclaimed Gustavus: and the voice of that young man was terrible, for it sounded like the voice of doom.

Nevertheless the half-frenzied Emily, wild with despair, rushed again towards him to throw her arms about his neck: but he, likewise half-maddened, pushed her from him with exceeding violence. Then a terrific shriek pealed from her lips: for she had reeled back to the edge of the precipice—the earth was giving way beneath her—another moment and she was falling down into the abyss.

Oh! then, mingling with her own piercing shrieks, rang forth the wild cries from the lips of Gustavus; and it was a perfect miracle that he himself was not hurled over the precipice by the sudden spring which he made forward to clutch the garments of his falling wife. But he failed to reach her; and it was only by throwing himself suddenly upon his back that he was saved. Quick as lightning he again started up to his feet. All was now still below; he looked over—he almost fell forward, while plunging his eyes down into the abyss. The sea—calm and shining like a lake of quicksilver—lay at the foot: there was not a speck upon its surface; and during the several minutes which the horror-stricken youth stood thus gazing over, down into that depth, no human form appeared on the bosom of that sea.

It was not with passionate exclamations,—no, it was in profound silence, that Gustavus turned away from the spot. A stupendous consternation was upon him: he was stunned—stupefied. The nightmare of dismay sat heavy upon his soul; and it was again with utter recklessness as to whither his footsteps might lead him, that he

moved slowly along. The last horrible shrieks of his wife were perpetuated in his ears,—not pealing and thrilling with a piercing keenness, but vibrating in a dull numbing manner, which might have indicated, if he had sufficient power for considering the subject, a partial congestion of the brain.

CHAPTER LIX.

SCANDAL IN THE PRISON.

WE are now about to bring back the attention of our readers to the British metropolis; and we must return to Winifred Barrington.

Nearly seven months had elapsed since the occurrence of those incidents which had so cruelly afflicted her:—nearly seven months, during which no tidings had been received from her cousin Gustavus, and the precious document was still as good as lost so far as her grandsire was concerned. Every endeavour had been made by Mr. Wardour the barrister, and Messrs. Cartwright the attorneys, to accomplish the desired aim without the production of that deed, and to effect old Mr. Barrington's release from gaol. A bill was filed in Chancery; but this process was a tedious one—as poor Mr. Barrington had already found to his cost in that grand suit which had now lasted upwards of thirty years. In reference to the emancipation of the old captive, Mr. Timperley did all that was required of him, by making affidavits to the effect that he had given up a particular deed the contents of which were in such and such a sense; for the Hon. Mrs. Hardress never refused her intervention with her uncle when it was besought by Agnes Evelyn on Winifred's behalf. But the affidavits would not do: there were wheels within wheels—there was a combination of the chicaneries of the law which in this particular case, as in so many others, defied common sense and common justice. In a word, old Mr. Barrington was still in prison on account of the absence of the deed; and there seemed to be no chance that he could obtain his emancipation until the law-courts sat in November—unless indeed the document should turn up in the interval.

The great Chancery suit likewise stood over till November, when it was positively understood that the Lord Chancellor would deliver his judgment. From a variety of indications it was tolerably well surmised in whose favour this judgment would be given: indeed the chances were considered to be at least ten to one in favour of Mr. Barrington. Every endeavour had been made by Cartwright and Co. to get the case on at an earlier period of the year: but neither the strictest legal integrity nor the most able management of the matter could wrestle successfully against those various and often unforeseen sources of delay which spring up in the Chancery Court. For, to be brief, it was now near the middle of September; and old Mr. Barrington was looking anxiously forward to “next Term” (in the month of November) which he felt confident would see the end of all his troubles and prove the era of renewed prosperity.

The large sum of money produced by the sale

of the ore and the gold dust, still remained invested in Winifred's name in the Bank of England. She was living economically and frugally, as hitherto,—still occupying the same apartments in Mrs. Slater's house—still regularly visiting her grandsire in the prison, and ministering to him with as much tenderness as ever. As we have seen, Winifred received no answer to the first letter which she had addressed to Gustavus at Mount Pleasant in Jamaica; and she was now anxiously waiting to see whether her second letter would prove more fortunate—for a sufficient period had elapsed since its transmission to justify her in looking for a response, if her earnest appeal had succeeded in eliciting one at all.

When we first introduced Winifred to our readers and gave some brief sketch of her history and her circumstances, we stated that she was looked upon as a young person of unimpeachable reputation; and such was her character for virtue and purity, that not even the most hardened libertine would dare to bend an insulting look upon her. All the gaol-officials likewise respected her: the turnkeys as she passed through the lobbies, the passages, or the gates, invariably touched their hats and had a kind but respectful word to say to Miss Barrington. Thus was it wont to be. But of late matters had begun to change somewhat. First of all it became whispered amongst the hangers-on of the prison that on several occasions when Winifred had left the gaol in the evening, she had been accosted by a gentleman who was previously waiting at the end of the street; and that she had walked away with him. At first the officials of the prison “pooh-poohed” the tale when it was reported to them, and were ready to stake their existence that it was all a mistake or a scandal. The narrators of the story however persisted in proclaiming that which they declared to be supported by the evidence of their own eyes; and they went so far as to hint that there might be a great deal of hypocrisy after all about Miss Barrington; for that though she had been acquitted of the charge of murder—and everybody believed rightfully acquitted—yet that it was indisputably on record that there had been some mysterious connexion between herself and the late Mrs. Chicklade, the nature of which connexion had never been cleared up. Thus Winifred's character was becoming a subject for discussion in the prison and its neighbourhood; and it was not long before even those who had been her most zealous defenders and champions, began to grow cold and look suspicious when it was stated by a gaol-official himself that he had seen her enter Mrs. Slater's house with a gentleman at eleven o'clock at night. To be brief, the rumours that were thus prejudicial to Winifred's fair fame grew more frequent and were more widely circulated, while they also acquired strength from a variety of little corroborative circumstances. The turnkeys now began to shake their heads and to look ominous; while the touch of the hat became less respectful and the passing word less kind. Winifred did not however seem to notice that there was this change in the demeanour of the officials towards her: or if she did notice it in reality, she affected not to do so.

At last suspicion began to point to a more serious indication of improper conduct, as it was

alleged, on Winifred's part. It was supposed that she was in a way to become a mother. A lynx-eyed old monthly nurse, who happened to be paying a friendly visit one day to the upper turnkey, and who was seated with that functionary in the lobby, saw Winifred pass by.

"Good day, Miss Barrington," said the turnkey.

"Miss Barrington indeed?" remarked the old monthly nurse when Winifred was beyond ear-shot: "she ought to be a *Mrs.*—or I'm very much mistaken!"

"What do you mean?" asked the turnkey.

"Why, I mean that in about two or three months' time that modest-looking girl whom you call Miss Barrington, will be a mother."

A few days afterwards the prison-surgeon was in the lobby, conversing with the same turnkey: again did Winifred pass—and the medical man ejaculated, when the gate had closed behind her, "If I did not think so well of that girl, I should suppose her to be in the family way!"

This opinion, following upon that of the monthly nurse, convinced the turnkey that the suspicion was only too well founded; and in a very short time the rumour was whispered that the young lady who had so long been respected as a pattern of rectitude and virtue, had fallen and become a guilty thing. And now it was supposed that the tale which had been circulated in respect to a box of gold-dust having been sent to Winifred was all a fiction—and that whatever money she might possess, was derived from the sale of her person to some infatuated individual. Scandal-mongers are always wisecracks after their own fashion, in settling the "why" and "because" of other people's affairs. And so it was in the present instance. They could now account for everything. Winifred was evidently in the keeping of some rich individual—perhaps of some nobleman; and despite all her prudery, she was no better than she should be. Ah! they always thought she was a designing hussy! The stillest water runs the deepest! Perhaps she had been prodigate for a much longer period than was even suspected, and with consummate artifice she had concealed her depravity. To be sure! it must have been so!—and that would account for her mysterious connexion with Mrs. Chicklade. Well, who after this would ever trust to appearances?

This was the sort of language in which scandal and gossip now indulged, until every one began to express surprise that any faith had ever at all been put in the idea of Winifred Barrington's virtue. The touch of the hat on the part of the turnkeys was now altogether discontinued; and instead of the kindly respectful word, spoken with a species of paternal interest, it was an abrupt "Good morning," or "Good evening," as the case might be; and if she paused to observe "that it was a fine day," the response would be a curt monosyllable. Sometimes Winifred started as if an idea had suddenly crossed her brain: sometimes she looked full of confusion, with the blushes glowing and burning upon her countenance: but for the most part she passed rapidly on through the lobby, passage, or gateway, whichever it might be—bending her looks downward, and shrinking against the wall as if to escape observation. Indeed, her conduct was in many a sense that of a

guilty thing; and no doubt any longer existed in the minds of even her most zealous defenders that she had fallen away from the path of virtue.

One morning old Mr. Barrington was walking up and down the prison-yard, in company with Mr. Robus. The breakfast was being prepared; and the old captive was in his flowered silk dressing-gown and his black velvet skull cap with a gold tassel, just as when we last found him sauntering in the company of the same individual seven months back.

"Ah! I wish it was next Term," said old Barrington, after a brief pause in the discourse. "When once November comes, Robus, it won't be very long before I shall find myself beyond these walls."

"Ah, well," interjected Mr. Robus, with a short dry cough, "when I see it I shall believe it."

"See it?" ejaculated old Barrington testily. "Why, of course you will! What is to prevent it?"

"What has prevented it time after time, for so many, many years?" demanded Robus. "Those circumstances, my dear sir, over which one has no control! And haug me if I don't think that the longer a fellow remains in gaol, the less controllable circumstances always do get!"

"Enough, Mr. Robus!" exclaimed old Barrington, now assuming an air of dignity. "I know what I may calculate upon, sir. I have an excellent barrister to advise me—good lawyers to act—"

"All very well, Mr. Barrington," said Robus; "but to my mind barristers and lawyers have closed more doors than they have ever opened."

"Ah, well! you shall see, my good friend! you shall see!" cried Mr. Barrington. "I'll wager you anything you like, Robus, that before the tenth of November my promised dinner to the prisoners will be given."

"I wish I may get it," said Mr. Robus, with persevering incredulity of look, tone, and manner.

"You shall get it, Robus!—and a happy day it will be! Ah, when I think of how rejoiced I shall feel—and how delighted my darling Winnie will also be—to gaze upon the festive scene, and to know that we are gladdening many hearts in celebration of the circumstance which at the same time will be gladdening our own—"

"Ah! then you think Miss Barrington will be with you on the occasion?" said Robus, with a malicious expression of countenance.

"With me? Of course she will be with me!" ejaculated old Barrington. "Why do you ask the question?"

"Oh, nothing! I only thought—Let me see—this is September. Ah! November will make just two months more—and that is about the time when Miss Barrington must expect—"

"Expect what?" inquired the old man, not entertaining the slightest notion concerning the drift of his companion's spiteful allusions.

"Ah, well," said Robus, "those who ought to be the first to see things, are always the last; and rumours may circulate round and round the very persons whom they most concern, without reaching their ears."

"Rumours?" said old Barrington: "I don't understand you! Perhaps I failed to catch some-

thing you said that might have explained your meaning; for I fear I've got a little deaf lately."

"And a little blind too," rejoined Robus curtly. "However, it's no business of mine—only it's a great pity—you see, people will talk—and I think that if your grand-daughter had been wise enough to retire into seclusion two or three weeks ago, before her position became so unmistakably perceptible—"

An ejaculation of mingled anger and terror burst from old Barrington's lips, as an idea of his companion's meaning now flashed in unto his mind.

"Mr. Robus," he said, "how dare you, sir, jest on such a topic? But confess it was a joke! Ha! ha! you wicked dog! you are always thinking of the girls! But really, Mr. Robus"—and here the old man became serious again—"it is a jest, sir, which in connexion with my grand-daughter—a young lady—I cannot permit."

At this moment the poor prisoner who had been preparing Mr. Barrington's breakfast, came up to the spot to announce that it was in readiness; and the old captive said, "I will presently speak to you again, Robus, on that point: I will tell you my mind! It is very unhandsome on your part—very wrong and unkind—but however, we will talk it over presently!"

Old Barrington proceeded into the ward, and seated himself at the table where his morning meal was spread. He tried to persuade himself that it was all nothing but a joke on the part of his friend Robus: but still he could not altogether succeed. There was a degree of uneasiness excited in his mind; and it was now increasing. He could not eat with his usual appetite: he kept looking at his watch—he was impatient for the arrival of Winifred.

Shortly after ten o'clock in the forenoon, she made her appearance. Her grandaïre received her with even more than the usual fondness of his welcome; for as he looked at her sweet interesting face, he ejaculated within himself, "Ridiculous! impossible! Winifred could not do wrong!"

He walked with her in the court-yard; and for some time all his misgivings were completely banished, until his eye suddenly resting upon her shape, the thought—the horrible thought—again flashed in unto his mind, to the effect that there might be something more than either mere jest or scandal in the allusions of Mr. Robus.

"Winnie—my dear Winnie," he said, taking her hand and pressing it between both his own, "tell me, my dear girl—tell me—tell your poor old grandfather that you have never done anything wrong—"

"Good heavens!" she murmured, glancing with affright up into the old man's countenance, while her own face became deadly pale.

"Oh, Winnie!" he said, in a whining snivelling tone; "my darling girl—my only comfort!—you—you—have not—No, no! impossible! You have not any secret which you would be afraid to reveal?"

"A secret?" gasped Winifred: and it was a species of horror, or rather a dismayed stupor, that was now expressed upon her countenance.

"Tell me, Winnie—tell me—Oh, I beseech you to tell me," exclaimed the old man, "are you not still as worthy as ever of my love?"—and his tone

became suddenly firm as it assumed the accent of solemn adjuration.

Winifred seemed for a moment as if she were about to be overwhelmed by the horror, anguish, and distress of her feelings; and then suddenly displaying a cold composure, she said, "Grandfather, I do not understand you! Such words from the lips of any other would be an insult: but from your's they come like something that is unintelligible!"

"Well, well, Winnie," said the old man, his confidence now completely restored again. "I was wrong—don't think anything more about it, my dear child!—it was very stupid on my part! But that impertinent fellow Robus, who is as full of venom as a serpent—and all because I shall get out of prison before him—for of course I shall get out next Term—shall I not, dear Winnie?"

"Oh, God grant that you may indeed leave this dreadful place very shortly!" said Winifred, in a low tone, but which was nevertheless full of anguish.

She quickly invented some excuse for leaving her grandfather for the present; and she hastened forth from the prison. Scarcely able to keep back her tears, she hurried along the streets: she reached Mrs. Slater's house—she ascended to her own apartment—and tossing off her bonnet and scarf, she fell upon her knees by the side of her couch, giving vent to an agony of weeping.

"Oh!" she murmured passionately, amidst convulsive sobs, "even *he* at length suspects it! Yes—suspects that I am dishonoured and disgraced! Malignant tongues have whispered it in his ear! What can I do? To return again to that place, is impossible!—to abandon the old man is equally impossible! To fall upon my knees before him and confess—No, no! that is even still more impossible, if indeed there be grades and distinctions in the sphere of impossibility itself! Oh, what can I do?"

Winifred wrung her hands in despair; she rose from her suppliant posture—she passed into the sitting-room—she sank upon a seat, and endeavoured to reason calmly with herself: but she could not. Her grief again burst forth with passionate violence: but this time it was of sufficient duration to afford a vent for her overcharged heart, and to leave relief behind it. When at length she was enabled to deliberate seriously with herself, her looks became composed—and her features resumed their sweetly interesting expression, as from her bosom she took forth a tiny velvet bag and pressed it to her lips.

Some one was now tapping at the door of her apartment: the little velvet bag was quickly replaced in the bosom of her dress; and she bade the person enter. It was the maid-servant of the house, who came to announce that a gentleman desired to see Miss Barrington on very particular business.

"Mrs. Slater is not at home," added the girl, "and I have shown the gentleman into her parlour."

Winifred descended the stairs; and on entering the parlour, she found herself in the presence of a tall gentleman whose age was somewhere between forty and fifty, though it was not easy to conjecture it with any degree of precision; for

while his hair was grey, his teeth were remarkably fine and well preserved, and his eyes were very bright. He was dressed in a complete suit of black which seemed to be entirely new, for the fresh gloss was still upon the cloth: his hat and gloves likewise appeared as if they were purchases made within the last few hours.

"You are Miss Barrington?" he said, at once taking her hand with a species of friendly familiarity; and he contemplated her countenance with an expression of the deepest interest.

"Pray be seated, sir," she said, wondering who he could possibly be—but desirous to find a pretext for sitting down and escaping from this close survey, lest he should discover that which could scarcely be any longer maintained a secret from the eyes of even the most casual observer.

The stranger sat down, his eyes still contemplating her countenance, but in a perfectly respectful manner, and with an air of paternal interest.

"And you are Miss Barrington?" he repeated, as if she were even more sweetly prepossessing than he could have previously imagined from any description he had heard or any idea he had formed of her. "But I must not keep you in suspense. I am—I am that Mr. Hargrave——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Winifred, almost starting with amazement; "the gentleman who wrote the letter from Jamaica about Mr. Timperley?"

"The same," responded Mr. Hargrave. "I arrived in London late last night—I have come from Jamaica—and I bring you, Miss Barrington—I bring you from your cousin Gustavus——"

"Oh!"—and she clasped her hands in joyous anticipation of what was to follow.

"I bring you the document which——"

"God be thanked!" cried Winifred, bounding forward from her seat to take the packet which Mr. Hargrave had just produced from his pocket. "A thousand, thousand thanks, my dear sir!" she exclaimed: "for now my grandsire can be free!"

"I called just now at the prison," said Mr. Hargrave, "with the intention of delivering this document into the hands of your grandsire—for such was the promise which I made to your cousin Gustavus in Jamaica: but then it suddenly struck me that as it was you, Miss Barrington, who had entrusted him with the document, to you should it be restored. Therefore I came hither."

"And Gustavus?" said Winifred; "is he well? is he happy?"

"He is well," replied Mr. Hargrave; "and in justice to himself must I give you the assurance that it was not his fault if that important document has been so long kept back."

"All this you shall explain to me another time!" exclaimed Winifred, nearly wild with the excitement of joy; "for this very day may my grandsire be released!"

"One word, Miss Barrington—and only one word!" cried Hargrave.

"Speak, sir," she exclaimed. "It is my duty to display all courtesy towards yourself!"

"Nay, I will not detain you a minute," rejoined Hargrave; "for I appreciate and respect your desire to hasten your venerable relative's release. But tell me, Miss Barrington—was it from Mr. Timperley direct that you in the first instance received this document?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Hargrave!" replied Winifred. "It was his niece, the Hon. Mrs. Hardress, who at the intercession of a young lady—a Miss Evelyn——"

"Miss Evelyn," repeated Mr. Hargrave. "Who—where——"

"Good heavens, are you ill?" cried Winifred, looking anxiously in the misanthrope's countenance.

"No—it is nothing," he answered, as calmly as he had before been speaking. "Miss Evelyn you say, I think—you mentioned her Christian name——"

"No—I did not; but it is Agnes. And I can assure you, Mr. Hargrave, that Agnes Evelyn has proved a dear good friend to me!"

"I suppose—I suppose," said Mr. Hargrave, "that the young lady resides in the neighbourhood—perhaps in the same street—and therefore you are neighbours——"

"Not so, Mr. Hargrave," replied Winifred, somewhat surprised at so much questioning. "Miss Evelyn lives at a beautiful place called Sidney Villa, in the neighbourhood of St. John's Wood."

"Farewell, Miss Barrington!" said Mr. Hargrave, now hurriedly rising from his seat, and warmly pressing Winifred's hand. "Lose not a moment in effecting the release of your grandsire! I will see you soon again."

He then hurried from the house; and Winifred, so soon as she was alone, went down upon her knees and poured forth her gratitude to heaven for the restoration of the document. Then she rushed up to her chamber, all wild with joy: she put on her bonnet and shawl—and she sped down the staircase again. In the hall-passage she met Mrs. Slater, who had just come in.

"The deed is arrived! it has come! I have got it!" exclaimed Winifred, triumphantly displaying the packet. "Hasten to the prison—tell my grandfather that to-day he shall be free! I am hurrying off to Mr. Cartwright to put everything in train for his release! Ah! Mrs. Slater, it is strange that your handsome first-floor should have become vacant last Monday; for now I at once engage it for the accommodation of my grandfather!"

Mrs. Slater gave vent to a few ejaculations expressive of her delight at the restoration of the deed; and while she sped away in one direction, to execute the commission entrusted to her, Winifred went off in another to put matters in train for her grandsire's release. Mrs. Slater performed her own part with delicacy and caution,—not breaking the intelligence too hastily to the old man, but communicating the joyous tidings gradually and deliberately. Old Barrington had moreover been prepared, more or less, to expect that the period of his release was not very far distant,—though it was now anticipated by a couple of months: thus, all things considered, there was nothing in the shape of a sudden shock of happiness, so to speak, to overwhelm the aged captive. Yet the tears ran down his cheeks—he whimpered while he smiled—he snivelled and laughed—cried and chuckled—and would perhaps even have danced if his friend Mr. Robus had not bidden him, with some degree of severity, "act like a man, and not play the part of a child."



The news spread like wildfire that the old prisoner whose captivity had endured for more than a quarter of a century, was at length about to bid farewell to the living sepulchre in which he had been so long entombed. The other prisoners belonging to the same compartment of the gaol, thronged about Mr. Barrington ostensibly to proffer their congratulations, but most of them being influenced by the more selfish motive of paying their court to him so that they might come in for a share of whatsoever good things it was his purpose to dispense in celebration of the event. Mr. Robus however kept on suggesting "that there was many a slip between the cup and the lip;" and he advised the old man to take everything as calmly as if there were going to be no release at all. Indeed he even went so far at one time as to express his conviction that there would arise some hitch at the last moment: but Mrs. Slater spoke so positively on the point that Mr.

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Barrington was not to be disheartened by the misgivings of his cynical friend.

"At all events," said Mr. Robus, "there's one part of all your prophecies which is not this day destined to be fulfilled."

"And what is that? what is that, eh?" inquired the old man, half nervous with joyous excitement, and half petulant at this fresh instance of churlishness on his friend's part.

"Indeed it is not exactly a prophecy that will remain unfulfilled," rejoined Robus; "but it is an oath that will be violated."

"An oath? an oath, Mr. Robus? What do you mean sir?" exclaimed old Barrington: "an oath to be violated by me? Ah! you allude to the dinner that I promised to give? Well, well—I had not forgotten it: it shall be given to-morrow—Mrs. Slater shall superintend it all——"

"I wasn't alluding to the dinner—I wasn't thinking of it!" exclaimed Robus; "and the truth

"I don't care whether you give it or not. But this is what I mean, Mr. Barrington,—that you have over and over again taken an oath to the effect that you will never leave this prison except in your own carriage——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Mr. Barrington with a start: "that's true—yes, very true! I had forgotten it! Mrs. Slater, do you think Winifred has borne it in mind?"

"No, Mr. Barrington," replied the worthy woman, "I don't think that Miss Winnie has troubled her head with any such nonsense. You will leave the prison in the course of the day; and that's enough for you to know. As for whether you will leave it in a cab, a glass coach, or a carriage, is a matter of not the slightest consequence; but you ought to congratulate yourself that it won't be in a hearse that you'll be carried away! Besides, Mr. Barrington, there's no need for you to have any vehicle at all; for you're going to stop at my house, and it's barely five minutes' walk from the prison."

"To be sure! to be sure!" said old Mr. Barrington; but he looked furtively at Mr. Robus.

This individual had at the moment an ironical expression upon his lip; but it gradually disappeared as his mouth was compressed into an expression of severity.

"An oath is an oath, Mr. Barrington," he said, with a certain dryness of tone and curtness of accent which seemed to be fully consonant with his naturally bitter and dog-in-the-manger kind of manner; "an oath's an oath—and people should be careful how they violate it. Besides, when an oath has arisen from a vaunt, it ought to be kept, not only on the score of one's virtue, but also on the score of one's pride. In plain terms, Mr. Barrington, if you are a man of your word and want others to respect you as such, you won't leave this prison till your own carriage comes to fetch you—no, not even if you were to stay in gaol till the end of your life."

Old Barrington looked confused and distressed: his pride had been appealed to, and his sincerity as a man had been as it were put at stake. But on the other hand there was his freedom! there was the happiness of restoration to liberty awaiting him!

"I wish, sir," said Mrs. Slater, thus addressing herself in indignant terms to Mr. Robus, "that you would hold your tongue, instead of putting all this nonsense into Mr. Barrington's head. I dare say that in some idle moment he may have made a boast about what he would or would not do: but if you mean that he is to keep in gaol just because that silly vaunt may not perhaps be fulfilled——"

"I know nothing, madam," interrupted Robus, "about idle vaunts or silly boasts. All I know is that the assertion has been spontaneously made by Mr. Barrington over and over again: he has ratified it with the most solemn and sacred vows—and therefore if there is any value in an oath——"

"Oh, enough of this nonsense!" ejaculated Mrs. Slater, now worked up to a positive pitch of indignation, which Mr. Robus surveyed with a calm cynical satisfaction. "Come, Mr. Barrington!—let us walk up and down to the court-yard a little. You require the fresh air after the excitement."

"And I don't think he'll enjoy the fresh air out of doors," interjected Mr. Robus, "seeing that freedom will have been purchased at the expense of an oath."

Mrs. Slater hurried the old man away out of the ward where this discourse had taken place: she conducted him into the court-yard, where they walked up and down together. Mr. Robus did not attempt to join them: he saw that he had thrown a damp upon the old man's spirits—he had mixed as it were the alloy with the pure metal of complete happiness; and in his cold churlish cynicism he was contented.

It was between one and two o'clock in the afternoon when Winifred was seen hastening across the court-yard, towards her grandsire and Mrs. Slater, who were still walking there. The affectionate girl threw herself into the arms of the old man, who strained her to his breast and wept like a child. It was a long time before Winifred could find the power of utterance or articulate what she had to say, so powerful were the emotions which agitated her. At length she murmured forth, "You can now go up-stairs, my dear grandfather—and dress yourself—for Mr. Cartwright is in the governor's office—delivering all the requisite papers—for—for your discharge—Indeed, everything is settled—and—and—by the time you are dressed, dear grandfather——"

"Yes, yes, dearest Winnie!" faltered the old man, who was whimpering and laughing with nervous excitement; "I understand, my girl! I understand!—the gates will be opened!"

"Yes, dear grandfather," responded Winifred; "and—and—but don't excite yourself now—don't give way too much—I was only about to say that as the streets must seem strange to you, and though the distance is so short to Mrs. Slater's house—yet still, as you have been here, dear grandfather, for so many, many years—and you must almost have forgotten what the outside of the prison is—I thought it would be better to have some kind of vehicle to take you away——"

"To be sure, Winnie dear! to be sure!" said the old man: "very, very considerate on your part! So you've got—a—a—a cab?" he faltered out.

"Not exactly a cab, my dear grandfather," rejoined Winifred, looking up into the old man's countenance with the sweetest expression of mingled affection and happiness: "not exactly a common cab—something better than that, you know——"

"Ah, well! a glass-coach?" said the old man: "or may be a postchaise?" he added: for at the time when he had entered the gaol upwards of a quarter of a century back, postchaises were as common in the world of vehicles as blackberries are in that of wild fruits.

"Now don't trouble and agitate yourself," said Winifred, affectionately coaxing, "about what sort of an equipage I have got in readiness. But pray go up and dress—and by the time you are ready to go the doors will be also ready to open for your egress!"

Old Mr. Barrington hastened to ascend to the dormitory to put off his dressing-gown and his skull-cap, and substitute a new coat and hat which he had by him. Meanwhile Mrs. Slater remarked to Winifred, "You don't know how I've been

vexed with that nasty, crabbed, ill-tempered fellow Robus, who wanted to make out that your grandfather ought to remain in prison all his life rather than violate an oath which he had taken——"

"Ah! an oath?" said Winifred, with a singular expression of countenance.

"Yes," said Mrs. Slater; "the foolish oath which you and I have heard him take over and over again, that he would never leave the prison unless it were to ride away in his own carriage."

"Ah!" said Winifred; "and Mr. Robus has been taunting my grandfather upon this subject?"

"Yes—but I cut him short," replied Mrs. Slater; "and I brought the old gentleman out to walk in the yard; so we've been lounging up and down here for the last two or three hours.—But here is your grandfather!"

Mr. Barrington now reappeared from the dormitory, where his toilet had been hastily changed; and it at once struck both Winifred and Mrs. Slater that he had a more jaunty air than ever they had before observed—that he walked more upright—and with a certain elasticity of step replacing the dragging heaviness which had been wont to characterize the motion of his limbs. An exulting expression diffused the glow of animation over Winifred's countenance, as she hastily whispered to Mrs. Slater, "The enjoyment of freedom will add ten years to his life!"

At this moment Mr. Cartwright—one of the eminent firm of Cartwright and Co. of Chancery Lane—made his appearance in the court-yard; and Mr. Barrington hastened forward to grasp the friendly attorney by the hand.

"Well, my dear sir—well," said Winifred's grandfather, in a half anxious tone, "is everything right?—no hitch—no delay——"

"All right, Mr. Barrington," answered the solicitor; "and permit me to congratulate you on your freedom."

"Freedom!—is it possible?" murmured the old man, with a sensation of sickness creeping over him, accompanied by a dizziness and confusion in the brain: "freedom!—is it possible, after six-and-twenty years of captivity! And will the turnkeys really let me out?—will they believe you when you tell them that I am free?—won't they shake their heads, and either smile upon me incredulously, or else look upon me with compassionating sadness?"

"Grandfather—dearest grandfather, you are free!" whispered Winifred: but her voice, though low, was of an exulting energy: "you are free! Sustain yourself!—lean upon my arm! You are staggering!"

"I am all right, Winifred," exclaimed the old man, now reawakened into completest consciousness of all that was passing around him. "Come, let us depart. Ah, here is Robus! Well, my good fellow," he ejaculated, as the cynic drew nigh, "do you believe that I am free now?"

"No—I shan't believe it till I see it," ejaculated Robus. "How often must I remind you that there's many a slip between the cup and the lip?"

"Permit me to tell you, sir," said Mr. Cartwright, stepping forward, "that I, as Mr. Barrington's solicitor, can vouch for the fact that he

is free to leave this prison at any moment; and I hope that in something like three minutes he will give you a practical proof of the sincerity of the declaration."

"Ah! don't be too sure!" interjected Mr. Robus,—"although I must confess that this certainly does look something more like a discharge than anything I have for a long time seen. But how about the carriage?"

"Ah! the carriage," ejaculated the old man hastily: "why, you see, if my dear Winnie could not manage it——"

"Enough! I understand!" said Mr. Robus, with an ironical smile. "The oath is of course to be sacrificed! Well, good bye, Mr. Barrington. I wish you your health and happiness—and that you may never repent having broken a pledge so solemnly taken."

"Do not be too hard upon my grandfather, Mr. Robus," whispered Winifred. "On the contrary, as an old friend of his you ought to come as far as the upper lobby to see him safe out of the prison-gates, and assure yourself that in the present instance there shall be no slip between the cup and the lip."

Mr. Robus was on the point of refusing, for he did not like to behold the happiness attendant upon an emancipation from prison while he remained a captive within its walls; but then he thought that if he went to the upper lobby, he should enjoy a species of malignant triumph over his old friend, by beholding him depart either on foot or else in a hired vehicle. So after a moment's hesitation he said, "Yes, by all means, Miss Barrington! I will go as far as the upper lobby!"

There was now a vast amount of leave-taking; for every one of the prisoners in that particular compartment of the gaol pressed forward to shake hands with old Mr. Barrington—and many of them with Winifred also. At length the ceremony was finished, and the little party began moving along the avenues towards the principal portals of the establishment. The turnkeys whom they passed, shook hands cordially with the old captive who was going forth to freedom: they likewise shook hands with Winifred—and now they had the kind word for her as formerly; for all their suspicions and misgivings against her were for the moment lost sight of or absorbed in other considerations. Winifred had prepared liberal gratuities for the turnkeys,—several little packets, each containing two or three sovereigns; and these she had given to her grandfather that he might bestow them as he passed through the respective gates or lobbies of the prison-officials. At length the upper lobby was reached: hands were shaken with the senior turnkey; and a little packet a trifle heavier than the former ones, was left in his grasp. Then the gate of the prison was thrown open.

"My God! I am really free!" murmured old Barrington, as his foot crossed the threshold; and he would have fallen under the influence of the feelings which suddenly seized upon him, had he not clung fast to Winifred's arm. "Good bye, Robus! God bless you, Robus!" he said, turning round to bestow a parting shake of the hand on the prisoner whom he had left behind.

"Well, good bye, Mr. Barrington," answered

Robus. "I wish you joy of your freedom with all my heart: but I perhaps should have been better pleased if the vaunt and the vow——"

"You may look out if you like, Mr. Robus," said the senior turnkey, who was in a most excellent humour, from the circumstance of having by this time ascertained that the little packet which had been slipped into his hand, had made him richer than he previously was to the extent of five gold pieces: "look out, Mr. Robus, if you like! There! go down on the first step, sir—pray don't stand on ceremony—I know you are a gentleman and won't take advantage of a good-natured act by bolting off like a shot."

And Mr. Robus availed himself of the head turnkey's permission: he crossed the threshold—he descended a step of the half-dozen leading up to the gate. But Ah! what meant that ejaculation of joy which burst from old Barrington's lips, and which was echoed by one of astonishment, not altogether unmingled with vexation, from the lips of Mr. Robus? An elegant equipage was at the door—a carriage with a pair of horses; and that everything was quite new, was proved by the harness as well as by the liveries of the coachman and footman.

"Winifred!" cried the old man: and he could say no more—but the tears gushed out from his eyes.

"Well, dear grandfather," responded Winifred, in a low tone, and with hasty utterance, "there was plenty of money left after paying all the debts—and so I thought——"

"Good bye, Robus!" vociferated the old man, turning round and flinging a parting word of triumph at his cynical friend. "After all, it was no idle vaunt, and the vow is not broken; for I shall ride away in my own carriage!"

CHAPTER LXX.

AFTER THE RELEASE.

MR. BARRINGTON was free. The equipage drove to Mrs. Slater's house; and in a few minutes the old man was installed in the handsome suite of apartments prepared for his accommodation. Over and over again did he embrace Winifred; and over and over again did she murmur, "Thank heaven, you have at length left that dreadful place!"

It at first appeared to be a dream, alike to the grandfather and the granddaughter; and throughout the remainder of that day they could speak of naught beside. An elegant repast was served up between five and six o'clock in the evening; but they could scarcely do justice to it—their hearts were too full to allow scope for appetite. They retired to rest early; for Winifred said to her grandfather, "When you awake in the morning, you will feel more settled."

On the ensuing day, while they were seated together at breakfast, old Mr. Barrington said, "Now tell me, Winnie dear, how matters stand at present—I mean, you know, in respect to money-affairs?—because it is still a couple of months before the Chancery suit can be decided—

though it must be settled in my favour next Term—eh, dear Winnie—eh?"

"Look!" said Winifred; "here is an exact account of all recent transactions. First you note that the sum of fourteen thousand five hundred pounds was bought into the Bank in my name about nine months ago. With the interest you may call it fifteen thousand. Thirteen thousand have been spent in procuring your release. My expenditure—a variety of things that have been purchased——"

"Yes, yes—I see!" said the old man; "and then there is the carriage—with the horses, harness, liveries——Doubtless Mr. Wardour's taste, Winifred?"

"No," she responded, in a soft voice, at the same time quickly bending down her head; for her cheeks were suffused with blushes.

"Not Mr. Wardour?" ejaculated the old man: but he did not perceive his granddaughter's emotion, for his eyes were still fixed upon the paper which she had handed him. "Then who assisted you in buying that handsome carriage and choosing those beautiful horses? You must have had some male adviser—eh?"

"Do you find that amount right?" asked Winifred, trembling very much, and still full of confusion.

"Well, I see that we have upwards of thirteen hundred pounds standing over——"

"And that sum is at a banker's, my dear grandfather," exclaimed Winifred; "and here is the pass-book—and there is the cheque-book—and as it all stands in your name, your drafts will be acknowledged!"

"Ah! this is excellent! capital!" cried old Barrington, rubbing his hands gleefully. "To be able to write cheques once more!" and his fingers itched to begin filling up a draft. "I must go and see Robus. I—I—don't think me vain and foolish, Winnie—but I'll just take the bank-book to show him for a moment—merely to prove that after all we are somebody——"

"Now do listen to me, dear grandfather," said Winifred, speaking very seriously. "I do not for a moment wish you to desert old friends or to forget those poor creatures whom you have left behind in gaol. But I nevertheless think that you have had enough of prison to be anxious to avoid it for the remainder of your life, rather than to seek it. You will do no good by penetrating within those walls; on the contrary, you will do yourself harm—because you will still be associating your habits and tastes with matters that savour of a gaol. This you must avoid, dear grandfather——"

"Well, well, Winnie," said the old man. "But the dinner which I promised to give those fellows?"

"The dinner shall be given," responded Winifred: "but there is not the slightest necessity for you to be present at it."

"Eh? what?" ejaculated old Barrington: "why, Winnie, I—I—rather thought—I—I—should preside on the occasion?"

"No," said Winifred, firmly yet kindly; "there is not the slightest necessity for you to take this course. Remain away from the prison—I beseech you to remain away from it! The dinner shall be given: I will go and issue orders at once

—Mrs. Slater shall make the necessary purchases—”

“Well, Winifred, I leave it all to you,” said the grandfather: “but let the dinner be a good one, for my credit’s sake. Robus shan’t have an opportunity of saying that I have flown from my promise! And I think, dear Winnie, that we will have the carriage presently—”

“Yes: and to-day you shall drive into the Parks, dear grandfather,” exclaimed Winifred: “you shall visit all the liveliest scenes! And perhaps we will make a call or two; for you must go in person to thank Miss Evelyn for all her kindness towards me, as well as her generous intervention with Mrs. Hardres for the purpose of procuring that document which after being for a while lost was yesterday restored, for the accomplishment of your deliverance!”

“Ah! and perhaps we shall see Mr. Hargrave?” suggested old Mr. Barrington; “and he will give us news of Gustavus.”

“Yes,” interrupted Winifred; “no doubt we shall soon see Mr. Hargrave. In fact, my dear grandfather, there is plenty upon our hands to while away the time for the present. And then too,” she added, more slowly and with hesitation alike in her looks and her voice, “after dinner to-day, my dear grandfather, I mean to speak to you about something—But no matter now!” she ejaculated, thus suddenly interrupting herself. “Here are the newspapers—amuse yourself with them, while I go and give instructions to Mrs. Slater to see about the banquet for the prisoners.”

Winifred issued from the drawing room, and descended the stairs. The maid-servant was at the moment at the front door receiving some articles which a tradesman’s boy was delivering. Winifred inquired if Mrs. Slater were in her own room?—to which query the answer was that she had just gone out for a few minutes. Winifred was on the point of returning towards the staircase again, when some one rushed hastily up to the door of the house. That individual at once caught sight of the young lady’s retreating form: and the name of “Winifred” was ejaculated from his lips.

“Gustavus!” and it was with a still more wild suddenness that this name was thrown off from the tongue of Winifred.

He rushed into the hall-passage,—he was on the point of clasping Winifred in his arms, when she held herself back, and presented her hand in a manner which at once convinced her cousin that a certain distance and reserve must be maintained betwixt them. Winifred had all in a moment recovered her presence of mind; and throwing open the door of Mrs. Slater’s sitting-room, she said, “Come here, Gustavus.”

And now the cousins were again together,—yes, again together after an interval of seven months since last they met! Winifred was pale, but outwardly calm; and there was an expression of sadness over that calmness; but a certain degree of dignity and self-possession were likewise apparent in her mien. She sat down, at the same time indicating a chair at a short distance for the accommodation of Gustavus. She now looked at him more attentively than she had hitherto been enabled to do; she perceived that he had a fearfully careworn look—he was thin, almost to emaci-

ation—he was pale and haggard—and there was also a wildness in his eyes, as if veritably those orbs had a certain glare of horror in them. On the last occasion they had met, he it remembered that the appearance of Gustavus was that of one who had become addicted to dissipation and begun to steep himself in debaucheries: but now his appearance was of a still more fearful character—it had in it something which seemed to indicate that wild feelings had been accustomed to agitate in the soul of late, and that the mind was far from unfamiliar with horrible thoughts. All this struck not Winifred at the first glance; but it gradually dawned in upon her comprehension as she had now leisure to contemplate her cousin’s countenance. The effect was to shock her most forcibly; and she sat in a silence that was gradually blending with the stupor of dismay. He on his part seemed at a loss what words to speak; so that it appeared as if he had been in the first instance led by some strong purpose or impelled by some powerful motive to seek Winifred, but at the instant of finding himself in her presence the purpose and motive both were forgotten—confusion on account of the present was blending with horror arising from the images of the past!

Winifred was the first to break this singular silence; and she said in a voice that was only prevented by the slightest degree of tremulousness from being wholly calm, “You are again in England, Gustavus. Let me hope that it is nothing unpleasant which brings you hither? at all events I have some agreeable tidings to communicate. Mr. Hargrave called yesterday morning; and yesterday afternoon”—here her voice vibrated with a strong feeling for a moment—“our grandfather was restored to freedom!”

“God be thanked!” said Gustavus, in a tone that was sombre and hollow, instead of being flexible and harmonious with exulting joy: “that good deed is at last accomplished—and I have no longer upon my head the crime of perpetuating his imprisonment! Oh, Winifred! did you not reproach me bitterly, bitterly?”

“Gustavus,” she replied, “we will not now speak of the past. Our grandfather is in the room above—will you not at once seek his presence? or shall I in the first instance go and prepare him to receive you?”

“No, not immediately, Winifred,” exclaimed Gustavus, almost impatiently. “I will go to him presently—but in the meanwhile I wish to say a few words to you.”

Winifred hesitated for a moment: there was the glistening of uneasiness in her eyes as if arising from a fluttering at the heart; and then she said with composure and firmness, “I do not think, Gustavus, that you can have anything to say to me which may not be said in the presence of our grandfather.”

“Yes, Winifred!” he exclaimed, with a sudden access of excitement; “I have much to say to you! I have to speak of things more important than you can perhaps dream!”

“Gustavus, what means this excitement?” asked Winifred: “of what important matters can you have to speak to me? Tell me—are you happy with your wife?”

“My wife?”—and here for a moment his countenance was convulsed with horror, while his

whole form trembled as if a wild tumultuous agitation were sweeping through it.

"Good heavens!" cried Winifred, affrighted at those altered looks; "what has happened to your wife, Gustavus? Something dreadful, I fear; for your regards—"

"No, no, Winifred! do not attach any importance—I mean to say that there was nothing in my regards—in short, Winifred, I know not what I am saying—"

"Good God, Gustavus! This does indeed seem to be only too true!"—and again did Winifred gaze with a real affright upon the countenance of her cousin.

"Oh, how uselessly you alarm yourself!"—and Gustavus affected to laugh; but there was something hollow and unnatural in the sound of his laughter, as if it were a captive in a dungeon whose attempted merriment derived a sepulchral sound from the living tomb itself. "In a word, Winifred, I ought to be more happy than miserable; for I am released from a thralldom which you know was most odious to me!—yes, liberated from that tyranny which tore me away from Eogland seven months back, without permitting me a moment's leisure to return to you, or to deliver the precious document into the hands of our grandsire."

"Liberated from this tyranny? freed from this thralldom?" said Winifred, repeating the words as if the action were mechanical and the words themselves were meaningless,—so vacant, so uncertain was her look.

"Yes, Winifred," resumed Gustavus; and again he essayed to chuckle—but it was a laugh which did one harm to hear it: "liberated from all those bonds by a power against which not even the indomitable self-will of the quadroon Emily could sustain a conflict! And that power, Winifred, was death!"

"Death, Gustavus?" said the young lady, with a start. "Death? Is Emily—your wife?"—she paused and gasped—"dead?"

"Yes, dead!" was the young man's response, delivered in the gloomiest tone and with the most sombre look.

"Dead!" repeated Winifred; and there was another pause: and then she added, "But, Oh, Gustavus! how light you seem to treat the loss of your wife! No—not lightly! I scarcely know how to describe it; for though there is laughter on your lips, there is horror in your looks. Oh, my God! Gustavus, the effect which all this produces upon me is something terrible! Ah, I fear to give utterance to the hideous thought!—but, Oh! heaven forgive you, Gustavus, if in a moment of desperation, goaded to madness by the very despotism of a wife's jealous love—you have done aught dreadful!"

"What, Winifred! do you think—do you—do you?"—and the youth gasped, while his countenance was so haggard—Oh, so pale and haggard!—"do you think that I laid a violent hand—"

"Just God! I know not what to think!" ejaculated the young lady, whose recent firmness and self-possession were all rapidly losing themselves in a terrible excitement. "Answer me, Gustavus—answer me as if it were the voice of heaven itself demanding an account of your wife—even as heaven's voice in the beginning of the world de-

manded from the first murderer an account of his brother!"

"Murderer!"—and it was in a hollow tone and with a shuddering form that the youth thus echoed the fearful word; while all the details of the frightful scene at the cliff in Jamaica swept like a horrible phantasmagoria before his imagination.

"Gustavus!" almost shrieked forth Winifred, "what means all this? Why have you risen up like a ghost before me, as if to proclaim something dreadful to my ears?"

At this moment the young man exercised an almost preterhuman power over himself: he became immediately calm and self-possessed—at least outwardly so; and therefore it was an unnatural tranquillity which thus seized upon him: but it was sufficient to deceive Winifred for a space—for she began to think that she must have cruelly wronged and outraged him with her wild suspicions, as he said, "Cousin, I know not wherefore we should be thus exciting ourselves. My wife is dead. It was no more my fault that she died than if any other human being were to put a period to an existence which had suddenly become intolerable."

"Ah!" said Winifred, shuddering: "then I begin to understand! Your unfortunate wife committed suicide—and the deed has left such a horrible impression upon your mind—"

"Yes, Winifred!" interjected Gustavus; "it is thus that you may account for any wild words which may flow from my lips, as well as for any horror that there may be in my looks. But did not Mr. Hargrave tell you anything? did he not give you any explanations?"

"He gave me none," ejaculated Winifred. "He simply assured me that it was not your fault the document had not been before delivered: he promised to call again, and enter more explicitly into details. Alas! I fear that those details must be sad, judging from all that has hitherto fallen from your lips."

"Sad indeed!" quickly replied Gustavus,— "more than sad!—fearful! atrocious! On the day that I parted from you seven months ago, I met my wife, who suspecting that I was here with you, had come to seek me. She lured me back to the hotel, by specious promises that she herself would presently accompany me to visit my grandfather and then to call upon you. She made me drink wine—she must have drugged that wine—I suspected it not then—I suspected it not indeed until months afterwards, when all the blackness of her wickedness suddenly burst upon me like a storm-cloud! But that it was so I have now no doubt! Therefore was it that under the influence of narcotics I was taken on board a ship: when I returned to consciousness the vessel was under weigh—and to go back was impossible! Emily soothed and tranquilized me with the falsest and most treacherous representations: she declared that she had forwarded the document to my grandsire, accompanied with the kindest messages to you both. On that point I was consequently satisfied."

"Oh, this was indeed very, very bad!" said Winifred: and then with her natural generosity of heart, she added, "But now that your unfortunate wife is no more—and since, after all, the document has come into our possession, and has

effected its object—we will not speak harshly of the perished one."

"No—'twere useless!" responded Gustavus. "But listen to the sequel. Exactly two months back I received your letter. It was your second letter, Winifred; for the former one—the one whereof you spoke in that second communication—had been intercepted; yes, intercepted by the guilty Emily—and I never received it!"

"Alas, poor Gustavus!" said Winifred compassionately. "And thus it was not until you received that second letter——"

"Not till then," added the young man, "that I knew the precious document had not been forwarded to my grandsire according to promise. I was maddened with grief and rage. I flew to search in Emily's drawers and boxes—I found the document. Ah! I should observe that Mr. Hargrave was with me at the time. He offered to bring the deed to England; and I thankfully accepted the service at his hands; for at that moment I was very far from suspecting or foreseeing that I myself was on the point of leaving the shores of Jamaica. Mr. Hargrave bade me farewell—we separated. Within that same hour I met my wife: it was upon the cliffs towering high above the sea, which lay at the foot of the escarped precipice. Fatal spot for such an encounter, where one of the two thus meeting was to overwhelm the other with the bitterest accusations, and that other was to be seized with all the delirium arising from flagrant exposure and a consciousness of damning guilt!"

"Good heavens!" said Winifred, starting up in horror from her chair: but instantaneously reseating herself, as she was struck by the remembrance that the least imprudence on her part would betray to her cousin the secret that she was in a way to become a mother, she added, "And thus it was in a moment of frenzy that the unfortunate Emily precipitated herself——"

"Yes—it was so," rejoined Gustavus. "No eye beheld the deed save mine and the all-seeing gaze of heaven! I rushed away in madness from the spot: I dared not return to my home—I felt that I might be accused as a murderer and punished as one!"

"Ah!" said Winifred, in a low voice, and clasping her hands with an evident sense of strong terror, as she flung a retrospective look over the recent circumstances of her own life; "there are cases in which circumstantial evidence does indeed make the most terrible combinations for the overwhelming of an innocent individual! But what did you then do, my unfortunate cousin?"

"I fled to Kingston. I knew that there was a packet to depart that very day, and in which Mr. Hargrave was likewise to leave Jamaica. But when I reached Kingston I found that the steam-vessel was already gone. Fortunately that very evening there was another ship to leave; and I took my passage therein. I know from inquiry that I must have set foot in England only twenty-four hours later than Mr. Hargrave himself; and what you are now said, has confirmed the fact. I am here, Winifred: I am here once more,—free! released from that horrible thralldom which arose from a combination of circumstances, producing an infatuation on which I now look back with astonishment!"

"Enough, Gustavus!" said Winifred; "you have told me your tale—and it is a shocking one. Forgive me, my dear cousin, if for a moment misled by your wild words and affrighted by your still wilder looks, I misjudged you so cruelly!"

"Oh, I forgive you, Winifred!" exclaimed Gustavus enthusiastically: "for of how much have you not forgiven me!"

"And now come," said the young lady, "and be received in the arms of your grandsire. Or rather go you alone to him—leave me here for the present——"

"I cannot go yet to him, Winifred—neither can I yet leave you!" exclaimed Gustavus. "It is for you first of all to set my mind at rest—to tranquillize me by the assurance that all the past is forgiven, and that it may possibly be forgotten!—my perfidy towards you——"

"Everything is forgiven, Gustavus," answered his cousin seriously. "With that assurance must you be contented. And now go and seek your grandsire."

"Not so, Winifred! You must tell me yet more than you have hitherto said! It is not when only two months a widower, I would be so indelicate as to propose that I may speedily conduct you to the altar——"

"Gustavus!" almost shrieked forth Winifred: and her small beautifully white hand made a sudden movement towards the bosom of her dress.

"Oh! is it possible that I have become an object of loathing and abhorrence unto you?" he cried, starting up from his seat. "Ah! tell me this, Winifred—and it will be the crowning of all my miseries! Tell me this—and it will be to deprive me of the last gleam of hope that can possibly smile upon my existence! Oh, tell me this, I repeat—and full soon will I imitate the example of my wretched Emily, by putting a period to my still more wretched life!"

"Gustavus," said Winifred, now seeing the necessity of tranquillizing her own emotions that she might, if possible, calm and soothe down those of her cousin, "we have both seen sufficient calamity in this world to teach us lessons which few persons of our age are accustomed to learn. You must exercise the power of self-control—you must indulge in no dreams that cannot be realized, and grasp at no shadows that will only delude you!"

"Do you mean me to understand, Winifred," asked Gustavus, in a low trembling voice, "that everything is at an end between us?"

Winifred did not immediately answer him. She looked at him steadily, as a person measures with the eye some one at whom a deadly weapon is about to be cast. But at length she said, "Everything, Gustavus, of the nature to which you allude, is at an end between us."

The young man gave a sudden start, as if he were moved by desperation's self: then he looked strangely upon Winifred—and he said, "You no longer love me!"

"I love you as a cousin—I love you as a brother," she responded, firmly yet lowly; "and as a relation shall I ever love you. Beyond that, Gustavus——"

"Beyond that, Winifred?"—and he trembled visibly, while his countenance was deadly pale and his ashy lips quivered.

"Beyond that there is nothing," she rejoined.

with the calm resolution of one who was determined to bring matters to a climax, rather than leave behind aught that might torture with suspense or excite a hope which might end in bitterest disappointment.

"Ah, then, Winifred!" said Gustavus, with something of a subdued fierceness in his accents, "I have indeed become unto you an object of aversion! You cannot forgive my perfidy—you are vindictive——"

"Vindictive, Gustavus?" exclaimed Winifred; "I vindictive! Oh, no! no! But"—and her delicately-formed hand again made a movement towards the bosom of her dress, and then she restrained herself in whatsoever she was about to do.

"You have ceased to love me," said Gustavus; "and the only hope which has brought me across the seas is destroyed! Better, better far, that I had hurled myself from the precipice down which the guilty Emily in the madness of her despair sought the path to oblivion! But I will not live! Winifred, I love you. For the last two months I have been asking myself why it was that I was never completely happy with Emily—why it was that in my own self there was something which inspired her with that mistrust which engendered all those watchings and followings, all that supervision and surveillance, all those plots and machinations, which constituted the monstrous tyranny of her conduct towards me. And I have found that it was because I loved her not with that pure and sacred passion which a husband should experience towards a wife. And why not? Because I loved another. And that other, Winifred, was you!"

"Gustavus!" she exclaimed, with a sort of horror in her looks; "this is language to which I cannot listen!"

"You cannot, Winifred?" cried Gustavus. "But such words, coming from the lips of a female, signify that she loves another! Ah, is it so, Winifred! Yes, yee!—you love another!—and Oh, therefore you never, never loved me!"

At this moment the door opened; and the servant-maid looked into the room for an instant, saying, "Miss Barrington, if you please, a lady——"

But the domestic stopped short, as if the lady whom she was about to announce had either imperiously silenced her with a gesture, or else had laid upon her a strong hand to pull her back from the doorway. Be this at it might, certain it was that the girl abruptly disappeared—a lady entered—she was closely veiled—and she closed the door behind her. She was well but plainly dressed; and though her countenance was utterly concealed by the sable veil, yet her figure—her height—her carriage—in a word, her entire bearing, struck Gustavus with a horrible consternation. At the same instant a wild suspicion flashed through Winifred's mind.

The lady advanced a few paces from the door; and stopping short, she threw back her veil with startling abruptness. The consternation on the part of Gustavus was only too well justified by the fact: the vaguely wild suspicion of Winifred was as rapidly confirmed. For it was the quadroon Emily who stood before them!

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE DRIVE.

GUSTAVUS was riveted to the spot in speechless dismay—horror paralysing all the purposes of his soul. The quadroon's eyes flashed not forth fires as was their wont during former scenes of excitement and crisis: but they now burnt with a steady lustre, which was all the more fearfully luminous on account of being so sinister. Her lips were firmly compressed: her entire attitude was that of resolution inexorable on her own side and irresistible on the part of any other. As for Winifred, she had mechanically sprung up from her seat: she now stood gazing upon the apparition of the dusky daughter of Jamaica—for an apparition did she really seem to be! Thus was it that under the influence which the startling event produced upon her, Winifred stood in the attitude that most naturally denoted the mingled bewilderment and terror to which she was a prey. She forgot at the moment everything connected with herself, and the necessity of so disposing her posture and carriage as to conceal the secret to which we have before alluded.

The quadroon gazed fixedly upon Gustavus for nearly a minute, as if to rivet him with the fascinating power of a serpent: and then she slowly bent her eyes upon Winifred. A slight start might have been perceptible on the part of the quadroon as her looks settled upon Winifred, then she gazed with a steady scrutiny—and then she averted her eyes, while her rich red lips wreathed for a moment with a smile that was barely comprehensible, but which might have been that of mingled scorn and triumph.

"Gustavus," she said,—"and now the young man himself started with a violent abruptness, as if he were a corpse being galvanised into sudden vitality,—"Gustavus, it is no apparition whom you behold; but your wife Emily who has come across the seas to claim you as a husband, and who demands that you at once follow her hence!"

The youth gazed upon her with an indescribable expression of mingled misery and horror in his looks: for though he was no longer under the influence of a preternatural terror, yet did he regard her as if it were his evil genius that was now confronting him face to face. Winifred had resumed her seat, painfully wondering how this scene would end—but with feelings too excited to allow her to reflect upon the possibility that she might have betrayed the secret of her own condition.

"Miss Barrington," said Emily,—"for I believe you are still Miss Barrington—at least the servant spoke of you as such"—and here there was another slight smile of irony curling the quadroon's rich red lips,—“towards you I have no animosity. I know that you did not invite your cousin hither—I know likewise that he has scarcely been half-an-hour in your company: therefore I have no ill-feeling——”

"Oh, Madam!" said Winifred, "from all that I have heard, you entertain no good feeling towards my poor grandfather and myself! But let



that pass. Gustavus, is it possible that you deceived me with a false tale?"

"Winifred, he has not deceived you," said the quadroon, "if he have told you that——"

Here Gustavus burst forth into a sort of hysterical laugh: it sounded like the laugh of a maniac;—and he exclaimed, "By heaven, this is a fine complication! But I will not go with you, Emily! You have lost your power over me!—the spells no longer exist! It is true I am your husband—and I shall exercise the husband's privilege, by asserting a right to command; while you as a wife shall obey. First of all, therefore, leave this house!"

It was a smile ineffably scornful which now curled the quadroon's lips: and her eyes at this moment had something most mockingly sinister in their luminous vibrations.

"You command, and I obey?" she said, in a

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tone of sovereign sarcasm. "No! in this case the order of things is reversed! You shall come with me. Hark!—one word in your ear!"

"No—not a word!" ejaculated Gustavus, recoiling from her with the most unfeigned terror. "Everything that comes from your lips has hitherto been false, and will prove false again! Depart! I remain here with those relatives whom I have hitherto neglected too long and too cruelly!"

"Do not provoke me!" exclaimed Emily; "or like a tigress will I fly at you!"—and now her eyes flashed forth the most vivid lightnings.

"Come on!" said Gustavus, who had the air of one that was driven to desperation; "and if you spring at me like a tigress, I as a lion will resist and meet you!"

It actually seemed as if a fearful contest were about to rage between the two; so that Winifred, affrighted to a degree that again made her see all

power of self-control and all presence of mind, sprang up from her seat to rush between them or to seek assistance.

"Ah! you would remain here?" ejaculated Emily, thus addressing her husband; and there was again a withering sarcasm in her tone. "Is it to listen to the drivellings of your grandsire?—or to father the child of which your cousin will soon become the mother?"

A cry burst from Winifred's lips: then she made an effort to speak—at the same time making an endeavour likewise to thrust her hand into the bosom of her dress. But a faintness suddenly came over her—she tottered to a sofa, and sank thereon, deprived of consciousness. Gustavus, electrified by the declaration which the quadroon had made, flung his startled looks upon his cousin as she thus staggered towards that sofa; and it was with utter consternation and dismay that he beheld the evidence of the truth of the assertion thrown out from the lips of his wife.

Gustavus was confounded; and he stood with staring eyes riveted upon the inanimate form of his cousin, who now lay stretched upon the sofa. His face was ghastly pale: it seemed as if some calamity more hideous and horrible than any which as yet in his life-time he had known, had just smitten him.

"But no!" he suddenly ejaculated: "Winifred cannot be guilty! Depend upon it she is married!"

"Married?" echoed the quadroon—but there was utter scornfulness in her voice. "And why, therefore, do they call her *Miss Barrington*?"

"True! my God, 'tis true!" cried Gustavus. "But, Oh! it must have been some stupendous treachery that could have made Winifred its victim! Never was there a purer soul!—never were there better principles innate in the heart of woman! Yes—pure and virtuous—"

"Enough of this ridiculous eulogy!" interposed the quadroon, seizing her husband violently by the arm. "Tis better that she should be lying there unconscious now!—'twill avoid a scene! Come with me, Gustavus!" added Emily in a peremptory tone: "come with me at once, I demand! This is no place for you—and you owe me all possible atonement!"

"Emily, I will not go with you," responded her husband. "No—I will not!"

"Ah! we shall see!" ejaculated the quadroon. "Now will I breathe in your ear the few words to which you would not ere now suffer me to give utterance. Murderer in intention! you shall obey me, or I hand you over to the grasp of justice! The English law takes cognizance of a crime committed in an English colony!"

Gustavus was smitten with the truth of the words just spoken: he again became as white as a sheet; and he gasped forth, "No, Emily—you would not persecute me to such an extent!—you would not be so cruel!"

"Once again, Gustavus, let me tell you that this is no place for you! Come with me—and let us calmly and deliberately speak of our own position, and decide how we are to act and on what terms we shall live for the future."

"All that is settled in a moment, Emily!" said Gustavus, with a species of doggedness in his tone. "I will not live with you!"

"Then beware of the vengeance you will provoke!" responded the quadroon: and her eyes flashed vivid lightnings. "Forth from my lips shall go the declaration that you are a murderer;—a murderer in intent—a base cowardly assassin, who sought to doom his own wife to the most horrible of deaths! Yes—all this will I proclaim! It shall reach the ears of justice—it shall render your name infamous throughout the world! Now, Gustavus, will you come with me?—because the very next moment that the word *No* issues from your lips, will I raise my voice to proclaim what you are!"

Gustavus reflected that it would be much better not to provoke a scandal in the house. A glance thrown at his cousin, showed him that she was still deprived of consciousness; and though he now thought far less highly of her than he had previously done, yet he was loath to have his name associated with the dread term *murderer* in her hearing. He thought too of his grandfather, whose feelings he was likewise anxious to spare; and moreover he knew that Emily was perfectly capable of fulfilling her threat by handing him over to the grasp of justice. All things considered, he saw at a glance that it was better to place a seal on Emily's lips, at least for the present; and he said, "I will go with you—I will go with you, Emily, if you will allow me to put one question to my cousin!"

"And what is that question?" demanded the quadroon.

"I would ask her the name of her seducer," rejoined the young man, "that I might know on whom a signal vengeance is to be wreaked!"

"Tis useless!" said the quadroon firmly. "You are not to become the champion of your cousin,—you who are bound to devote your life unto another!"

"Another time," thought Gustavus to himself, "I will learn the truth of all this!"—then bending his eyes upon Emily, he said with mingled doggedness and fierceness, "I am ready to follow you, Madam. Lead the way."

"Madam!" echoed the quadroon, for a moment starting with indignation—while the rich red blood mantled in her cheeks through the transparent duskiness of her skin, and she flung a lightning glance upon her husband. "But no matter!" she muttered between her brilliant teeth; "I will conquer—I will subdue him! I will make him crouch at my feet! I will now so completely break his spirit that never more shall he be enabled to assert his own will in opposition to mine!"

Gustavus beheld the angry aspect of his wife; but little recked he for it now: other thoughts and considerations were in his mind; and it was in a mood of gloomy sullenness that he accompanied her from the house.

Winifred awoke to consciousness; and as she sat up on the sofa where she had been lying, she glanced vacantly around the room, with the idea that she had been passing through the phases of some wild dream; but full soon did the conviction break upon her that all she remembered, and all she was then thinking of, consisted of the sternest realities; and clasping her hands together with the most poignant anguish, she murmured, "And he too!—he now looks upon me as a lost, degraded, fallen creature! But all this shall end!—yes,

it shall end!" she added, suddenly starting up to her feet: "the secret shall no longer lie like a weight of lead upon my soul!"

The resolution to which Winifred had just come, inspired her with fortitude, and even conjured up the animation of happiness on her countenance. She drew forth from her bosom that little velvet bag of which we have before spoken: she pressed it to her lips—and then, as she replaced it in the corsage of her dress, a sunny smile remained playing upon those lips.

Winifred now became anxious to ascertain to what extent the visit of her cousin and his quadroon wife was known in the house, and the nature of the impression it had made: but she soon discovered that Mrs. Slater had not yet returned—that her grandfather was seated up-stairs in the drawing-room busied with some books and newspapers, and that he had overheard nothing to make him suspect anything peculiar or unusual was taking place. After a little reflection, Winifred resolved not to tell the old man that Gustavus was in England and that he had been at the house. She knew it would only excite her grandfather, and make him ask a thousand questions in respect to the cause of his sudden disappearance again without paying his respects to his old relative. And then, too, Winifred fancied that it was more than probable that since Emily had so suddenly appeared, she should not very shortly see either of them again: at all events she felt that if the contrary should prove to be the case, it would be time sufficient to make what revelations she might think fit to her old grandseire.

In the afternoon the carriage was ordered: and Winifred took her grandfather for a tour about the Parks. She was endeavouring to amuse his mind as much as possible—to keep him in an excellent humour—and at the same time to make him feel that her presence was indispensably necessary to his happiness. She conversed with a degree of gaiety that she was seldom wont to display; and she was pleased to observe that her grandseire's mood was full of cheerfulness. They called at Sidney Villa, and found Agnes Evelyn at home. Most cordial was the welcome which they received on the part of our beautiful heroine. It was the first time that Agnes had ever seen Mr. Barrington—the first time also that he had ever met the young lady of whom his granddaughter had so often spoken in the most affectionate and grateful terms. Agnes was unfeignedly rejoiced to greet the aged man on his liberation from so lengthened a captivity; and she inquired how it had happened with so much suddenness, and at least a couple of months sooner than had been expected according to what Winifred had said when she and Agnes last met?

"A gentleman from Jamaica," responded Winifred, in explanation, "arrived suddenly yesterday morning; and he brought from my cousin Gustavus the deed which for seven long months had been wanting. This same Mr. Hargrave had on some former occasion displayed a certain degree of interest in our behalf—no doubt on account of Gustavus, for whom he had conceived a friendship."

Having passed an hour at Sidney Villa, old Mr. Barrington and Winifred rose to take their departure; and Winifred found an opportunity of bas-

tily whispering in the ear of her friend Miss Evelyn, "I am resolved that this day shall not pass without the revelation of everything to my grandseire!"

"Heaven grant, my dear Winifred," replied Agnes, likewise speaking in a whisper, "that all may turn out for the best!"

Significant looks and kind pressures of the hand were exchanged between the two young ladies; and the kindhearted Rachel was waiting on the threshold of the villa to proffer her congratulations to Mr. Barrington and to speak a friendly word to Winifred.

When the old man and his granddaughter were again seated in the carriage, the footman stood awaiting further orders; and Winifred desired that the equipage should now return to Aldersgate Street.

"Not yet, my dear," said Mr. Barrington,— "not yet! I should like to extend our drive a little, and round about this neighbourhood too."

"This neighbourhood, my dear grandfather?" said Winifred. "Why this neighbourhood?"

"I'll tell you presently, my dear. Let the carriage drive on."

Winifred could offer no remonstrance in the presence of the domestics; so the lacquey sprang up to the box and resumed his seat by the side of the coachman. The equipage drove onward, instead of retracing its way into London; and Mr. Barrington kept looking from the windows, exclaiming, "Good heavens, what changes have taken place!—how altered is the entire scene!"

"And why, my dear grandfather," asked Winifred timidly, "have you come up into this neighbourhood?"

"Do I not know," exclaimed the old man, "that my mortal enemy has a beautiful villa in this district? Yes, Winifred!—twenty-six years ago when I was first consigned to a gaol, all this neighbourhood was but comparatively dotted with houses; and now there are whole lines of habitations and streets and terraces—and amongst all the beautiful retreats which during that interval have sprung up here, I know from all I have heard that none is more charming than Sir John Dalham's villa! Ah, Winifred! can you guess why I was this moment enabled to mention that hated name with a certain degree of calmness? It is because I know the day of retribution to be nigh! I can now wait patiently for it—I can look forward without excitement to its approach; and then, Winifred,—~~then~~ what vengeance will there be——"

A low moan escaped from the young lady's lips, as she threw herself back in the corner of the carriage: but her grandfather noticed it not.

"And then what vengeance there will be," he went on to say, "for all the wrongs of the past! Yes—yes! Winnie, there shall be vengeance! My enemy, the bearer of the accursed name of Dalham, will be ruined; and who can tell but that even the very villa itself which we are now approaching may become our property? I wish to look upon it—to behold it—to see what it is like—to gloat over it as if it were at something that must sooner or later come into my hands!"

Another moan, somewhat louder and more prolonged than the first, came from the lips of Winifred; and this time her grandfather noticed it.

"Why, Winnie my darling," he exclaimed, "what is the matter? Why, you are sobbing, I declare!"

"Do you not know—have you not suspected, my dear grandfather—how can I allude to it—but here—close by—up this very lane, into which the carriage is now turning——"

"Ah, I forgot! I forgot, my dear girl!" said the old man, becoming nervous and excited. "I would not for the world—don't sob so, dear Winnie!—what can I do? Here—where is the checkstring?"

"Do nothing, my dear grandfather! do nothing!" said Winifred hastily. "The carriage cannot turn here—the road is too narrow—we must pass the spot! And why should we not?" exclaimed Winifred, in a suddenly altering tone. "I can look with a calm conscience upon it!"

"Ah, thank God for that, my dear child! thank God for that!" ejaculated the old man. "But still—but still we will not pass the spot——"

"We are passing it now," said Winifred. "Look! 'twas there!"

But though she thus indicated to her grandsire that scene of foul mysterious murder, yet she herself closed her eyes; for she could not look upon it. The carriage rolled past; and now from the window on the left-hand side Sir John Dalham's villa was to be seen, embowered amongst the trees which were already putting on their autumnal tints. The old man pulled the checkstring, and the carriage stopped. Winifred bent upon him a glance of anxious inquiry.

"It is a nice house, and pleasantly situated," said Mr. Barrington. "It will do very well for us, Winnie."

"My dear grandfather, I like not to hear such language come from your lips! Let us be charitable and magnanimous——"

"Charitable and magnanimous towards the Dalhams?" literally shrieked forth the old man. "Charitable to an adder?—magnanimous to a viper?"

"Grandfather!" ejaculated Winifred, with a sudden access of wildness: but in a moment she checked herself—and whatever else she felt was only expressed by a half stifled sob.

"All these things excite you, my poor dear Winnie," said the old man. "Yesterday was a trying day for you—and you have not yet recovered it. Moreover, you are getting rather nervous, Winnie. But I should just like to know now many acres belong to that villa?—Thomas!"

"Yes, sir!"—and the footman was immediately at the carriage-door.

"Do you see any person—any labourer or poor man, I mean—of whom we may ask a question or two?"

"No, sir. But ah!" added the footman, "there is a gentleman approaching!"

"Well, well," said Mr. Barrington, "there would be no harm—I'll just put a question to him—quite in a civil way——"

"Grandfather, you cannot think of it!" hastily and earnestly whispered Winifred: for she dared not speak out loud, as the footman was still at the carriage window.

"Nonsense, my dear child!—don't be foolish!" said the old man: "there's no harm in asking for

information!—I should hope that I know manners as well as anybody."

"Here is the gentleman, sir," said the footman at this moment.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said old Mr. Barrington, thrusting his head out of the window, "but would you oblige me with a little information, if you happen to be acquainted with these parts?"

"I shall be most happy, sir," was the response given by the gentleman who had that moment come up to the spot where the equipage had halted.

But that voice! Winifred started—and it was with difficulty that she could keep back a shriek which was ready to peel forth from her lips; for she recognised the voice of Roderick Dalham! And now, the next moment, a sudden revulsion of feeling took place within her; and she felt glad that her grandsire and Roderick had thus met—that they were speaking civilly to each other—neither entertaining the smallest suspicion who the other was! For though many long years back they had met, yet Roderick was then a boy of eight or ten; and it was therefore the height of improbability—indeed almost an impossibility—that there should be any recognition now. Winifred lay back in the corner of the carriage, unseen by Roderick, who had stopped at a little distance on being addressed by Mr. Barrington.

The colloquy progressed.

"I shall be most happy," Roderick Dalham had said, with the bland courtesy that was natural to him, "to give you any information that lies in my power."

"Perhaps you live in this neighbourhood, sir?" asked the old man, with true senile garrulity.

"Not exactly," said Roderick. "I live for the most part in London—but I am sometimes in this neighbourhood——"

"Perhaps you know Sir John Dalham, sir?" said the old man. "But it might be as well to inform you that my name is Barrington——"

"Barrington! indeed!" ejaculated Roderick; and at the same instant he caught a glimpse of a white kerchief at the window; so that he now knew Winifred was inside the carriage. "I presume," he continued, in the same courteous tone as before, "that I have the honour of speaking to that same Mr. Barrington who is plaintiff in the celebrated Chancery suit, and whose release yesterday from a prolonged captivity is mentioned in a paragraph which I read in this morning's newspaper?"

"Yes, I am that Mr. Barrington," responded the old man. "But perhaps you are acquainted with Sir John Dalham?" he repeated.

"I have some knowledge of that Baronet," rejoined Roderick, with the completest self-possession. "But I do not hesitate to add, from all I have heard in reference to your pending lawsuit, that you, Mr. Barrington, will not merely gain the day, but that you deserve to come off victorious."

"Ah! such is your opinion, sir? Do you hear that, Winnie my dear? Pray let me shake hands with you, sir! It is very kind of you—very kind indeed!" and the old man almost whimpered with joy.

"Most cordially shall I shake hands with you, Mr. Barrington," answered Roderick: but no one who heard him thus speak, except Winifred her-

self, observed that there was a slight tremor in his voice.

And now how wildly palpitated Winifred's heart as she became aware that her grandfather was at the moment shaking hands with Roderick Dalham!—yes, grasping in friendliest pressure the hand of him whom, as well as his father, he had sworn to hate, loathe, and detest to the end of his life!

"I am delighted to form your acquaintance, sir," said the old man,—"very much delighted. You know my name—I don't know—eh?—whether I heard you mention your's or not?"

Roderick coolly took out his card-case, and said, "What information, Mr. Barrington, is it that you require?—for I sincerely hope I shall be enabled to afford it."

"How many acres belong to that villa, sir?" asked the old gentleman.

"I can tell you exactly," replied Roderick. "There are a dozen acres of garden-ground and paddock attached to the dwelling."

"And the house itself is commodious—eh?" continued old Barrington eagerly.

"Very commodious," responded Roderick, who was still playing with his card-case as if about to take forth a card and hand to the aged occupant of the carriage.

"Very commodious—eh? Do you hear that, Winnie my dear? This gentleman tells me that it is very commodious. The fact is, my dear sir, between you and me, Sir John Dalham's suit is already as good as lost; and when lost, he will be ruined—so that it is tolerably certain the villa yonder, as well as all the rest of the property will come into my possession; because what the judgment of the Court does not give me as my right, I shall buy up, sir—I shall buy up! For everything that Sir John possesses, must inevitably come to the hammer—I mean all that the Court will leave him."

"Grandfather!" said Winifred, softly yet firmly, "you are speaking too plainly—too openly—"

"I know what I am saying," ejaculated the old man aloud; "and I feel confident that in a very short time we shall be seated within the walls of yonder villa. And if so, sir," he continued, now again addressing himself to Roderick, "nothing will give me greater pleasure than to receive you at the house—and we will drink a bottle of wine to our better acquaintance."

"And to our friendship," added Roderick. "Believe me, my dear sir, it would be one of the happiest moments of my life to find myself seated with you over a glass of wine in yonder villa."

"But there's no reason," said Mr. Barrington, "why we should not see each other very soon again. I am stopping for the present in Aldergate Street, No. —. I shall be very glad if you will favour me with a call."

"I am often in that neighbourhood," replied Roderick. "I shall be most happy—"

"The sooner the better," exclaimed the old man. "What shall you be doing this evening?"

Roderick Dalham at the moment beheld the white kerchief again waving at the window, but in a manner that was significant only for himself: and he comprehended the meaning of the sign.

"I shall be disengaged this evening?" he said; "and it would really afford me much pleasure to pay my respects."

"Come at eight o'clock," said Mr. Barrington: "be upon no ceremony—you will have simply a cup of coffee and a good glass of wine—but a very cordial reception, I can assure you."

"At eight o'clock, my dear sir, I will be punctual," answered Roderick, who had just elided his card-case back into his pocket, without taking any card thence, as the reader may be very well assured. "Punctual at eight."

Hands were again shaken: Roderick lifted his hat in courteously respectful salutation to the old gentleman; and he hastened on his way. Mr. Barrington now ordered the equipage to drive homeward; and as it rolled along the lane, he said to Winifred, "A very nice gentleman, that!—a very nice man indeed! But dear me! did he give me his card! Well, this is very strange! He meant to do so—he took out his card-case on purpose. I saw him do it. Well, he must have forgotten. But you see, my dear Winnie, how easy it is to make a friend by a little gentlemanly courtesy—"

"Ah! and so very much better," ejaculated Winifred, "to make a friend than an enemy!"

"Why, of course, my dear—no one would travel out of his way to make an enemy, nor go half-way to meet one. But sometimes enmity is forced upon us—"

"And friendship is formed by accident," interjected Winifred,—"as you have formed this friendship to day."

"Well, my dear girl, you are really talking quite rationally and sensibly, and just as I like to hear you," said the old man, patting her cheek.

"I fancied you would blame me for making hasty acquaintances—I thought to myself that you would be sure to find fault, and tell me that I ought to be more cautious—more reserved—and so forth—"

"No, no, my dear grandfather!" exclaimed Winifred, "you have acted perfectly right!—believe me, you have acted perfectly right! And you like that gentleman very much—do you not?"

"Of course!—or else I shouldn't have invited him to see us. By the by, I quite forgot to introduce you, Winnie, as my beloved grandchild."

"I shall see him this evening," said Winifred. "But why—what made you—I mean how was it that you took such a sudden and strange fancy to that gentleman?"

"Sudden perhaps—but not strange," ejaculated Mr. Barrington. "Do you know, my dear Winnie, that I very often act upon impulses? I generally take a liking or a dislike to persons at once."

"And in this present case," said Winifred, in a voice that would persist in being tremulous despite all her efforts to render it firm,—"you— you—"

"In this present case," rejoined her grandfather, "I took a strong liking at once. But of course I did, Winnie! Did you not hear how he spoke about the lawsuit?—and wasn't that handsome on the part of a perfect stranger? He is a manly fellow too, Winnie! He knows Sir John Dalham—whereas on the other hand he never knew me from Adam till to-day; and yet, as you heard, he at once and most unhesitatingly pronounced his judgment in my favour. Who could help liking such a man?"

"Oh, of course not! You must indeed like him!" said Winifred. "But apart from his kind feeling towards yourself——"

"Well," interjected Mr. Barrington, "that gentleman has everything in his favour. His manners are excellent—he is decidedly good-looking—remarkably fine piercing eyes—and a very pleasing voice. Altogether, my dear Winnie, I am very glad we have formed his acquaintance; and you must get a nice little dessert—and we will send across to the Albion for some of their very best wine——"

"Rest assured," exclaimed Winifred, her heart palpitating with joy, "that everything shall be done to give that gentleman a most welcome reception."

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE LITTLE VELVET BAG.

It was between seven and eight o'clock in the evening—the grandfather and granddaughter sat together in the handsome drawing-room at Mrs. Slater's house. Winifred had insisted that her aged relative should make himself comfortable, and not stand upon any ceremony in the reception of the expected guest. She had therefore persuaded him to put on his slippers and his dressing-gown; and the old man had yielded to her wishes. Wine and dessert were upon the table; and the cheerful sparkle in Mr. Barrington's eyes showed that he had already assured himself that the cellars of the famous Albion Hotel in the same street had furnished good specimens of foreign vintages.

Mr. Barrington was seated in his arm-chair: Winifred had placed herself on an ottoman by his side. She looked up affectionately into his countenance: she assured herself at a glance that he was in the best possible humour, as well as in the kindest mood; and she said within her own bosom, "Now is the favourable moment for entering upon the revelation of the secret!"

"My dear grandfather," she presently began, taking his hand and pressing it between both her own, "you will perhaps be surprised—but I am very certain that you could not possibly be annoyed—to learn that the gentleman whom we are expecting is not altogether a stranger to me——"

"I do not understand you, Winnie," interrupted the old man. "You did not speak to the gentleman to-day——"

"No," said Winifred: "I had my reasons. Pray be patient! You don't know, my dear grandfather, how nicely everything will come out in the long run——"

"But who is this gentleman, Winifred?" asked Mr. Barrington, somewhat seriously: "and why should there have been any mystery in your acquaintance with him? 'Pon my honour, if it were not for the way in which he himself spoke about the lawsuit, I should almost be inclined to fancy from this mystery that you are making, that it was Roderick Dalham himself—though on second thoughts I should know that to be impossible; for Roderick Dalham is a poor wretch,

worn out by debauchery—pale and emaciated—— At least so I was told some time ago—and I do believe it was Timperley that gave me the description! But what about this gentleman, Winnie? His name——"

"Repeat to me, my dear grandfather," said the young lady, "what you told me as we were driving home from St. John's Wood,—that you have conceived a great liking towards this gentleman? It is so, dear grandfather—is it not?"—and Winifred looked up into the old man's countenance with that winning cajolery which has naught of sinister hypocrisy in it, but is replete with mingled affection and good intention.

"To be sure, my darling girl! I conceived a great friendship for that gentleman!"

"And when you come to know more," resumed Winifred, "you will experience other sentiments——"

"Other sentiments?" said the old man inquiringly.

"Yes—gratitude for instance," rejoined Winifred; "and gratitude, you know, my dear grandfather, is a sacred duty——"

"Of course! where gratitude is due!" exclaimed Mr. Barrington. "But you astonish me, Winnie! How can there be any gratitude towards one whom I never saw before in my life, and who cannot possibly have had it in his power to render me a service?"

"Services may be rendered," said Winifred softly, "without the necessity of the benefactor being always seen. In fact, true philanthropy very often conceals itself behind a curtain, until by some accident revealed—as was the case in this instance," added Winifred quickly; for she was naturally desirous to skip as lightly and rapidly as possible over the real circumstances attendant upon her introduction to the individual of whom she was speaking.

"What on earth are you talking of, Winifred?" asked her grandsire. "You bewilder and mystify me! I don't think it can be the wine I have taken——"

"No—you have only had two glasses. Listen—and my speech will grow clearer. I tell you that you are under the deepest of obligations to that gentleman! You would have starved, my dear grandfather—or at least you would have wanted the commonest necessities——"

"What, Winifred?" ejaculated the old man: "do we owe that gentleman money?"

"No! If we owed him money only, we could pay it: but believe me, dear grandfather," exclaimed Winifred, with enthusiasm, "we owe that gentleman a debt of gratitude which is unpayable!"

"Ah!"—and the old man looked strangely upon Winifred; for the suspicions which the malignity of Robus had first engendered in his mind were now reviving there. "Winnie—dearest girl"—and now he began to whimper—"you would not have me believe—you would not give me to understand—that—in a moment of desperation—when perhaps you feared lest your poor old grandfather should be wanting bread—you do not mean, dear Winnie——But if you did, you know I should forgive you—yes, I should forgive you——"

"Oh, speak not thus!" exclaimed the young

lady, bursting into tears, and throwing her arms about the old man's neck: "I have not disgraced you!—believe me that I have not disgraced you! That gentleman of whom we are speaking is the very soul of honour!"

"Ah, well, well, Winnie—now I breathe freely again!" said the old man. "Give me my glass, dear child.—that's right! Now put it down again. Ha! the wine's good! Come and tell me all the rest that you have to say. The gentleman is the very soul of honour? Well, I'm glad of that; for after being twenty-six years in prison, and having a lawsuit that has lasted thirty-one, a person is not very likely to entertain an over good opinion of the world. However, this gentleman you say—But what's his name, Winnie?"

"His name? Oh, I will tell you in a moment!" and she spoke quickly. "Now, my dear grandfather, there was a cheat which I put upon you—it was a very innocent one—it was at the time when you thought I was earning so much by my needle—whereas, though I worked incessantly, I could only earn as many pence as you fancied I was obtaining shillings."

"Well, Winifred—well?"—and again were there anxiety and uneasiness upon the old man's countenance.

"It was this gentleman who supplied a weekly sum which gave you comfort—which saved you, dear grandfather, from many a cruel strait and ignoble shift! In a word, I know not what really would have become of us without the succour of that generous man!"

"Indeed! is it so, Winnie?" cried Barrington. "And Oh, my darling girl! you can look me thus in the face and declare that you have accepted all these bounties for myself and for you, without—without any sacrifice of—of—your own good principles—"

"Grandfather," interrupted Winifred, solemnly, "it was the bread of the noblest generosity which you have eaten—and not the bread of your grandchild's shame. No!—as I have a soul to be saved, I have experienced only the most chivalrous magnanimity on the part of that gentleman—"

"Come to my arms, Winifred!" cried the old man, again whimpering and snivelling with mingled joy, and gratitude, and nervousness: "let me embrace you! You know not how immense is the relief my soul now feels, and how light is my heart! But proceed, Winnie! Ah, you have still forgotten to tell me the name—"

"Wait till I reveal to you something more," interrupted the granddaughter. "But first tell me what think you of any person who might save my life?"

"Save your life, Winifred? This is a strange question! But of course I should love such a person as the dearest of friends."

"Ah!—and suppose that it was not by mere accident and all in a moment that the great boon was conferred,—for instance, it was not as if I fell into a river and the first passer-by rushed to my assistance,—yet you would love the person who might do this, though almost every one would perform such an act if an opportunity presented itself? But suppose that I was in some sore trouble—that I and death were looking each other in the face—and that the last glimmering of hope

were yielding to the darkness of despair,—suppose I say that in such a case, some person resolved to save me—that he devoted himself to his task—that he boldly grappled with sore obstacles and in silent perseverance undermined others,—suppose that he pursued his object with a zeal, a tenacity of purpose, and a calm dauntlessness, which being blended with a rare intelligence, led on to the achievement of success? Now, what would you say in reference to such conduct as this? and what would you think of such a person?"

"You are almost bewildering me again, Winnie," said the old man; "but still I think I comprehend your meaning; and I therefore say that the conduct would be most magnanimous and the person himself most admirable."

"True, dear grandfather! you could not express yourself in more appropriate terms! Well, then, such was the conduct of the gentleman to whom we are alluding: and now you will admit that as a man he is most admirable?"

"No question of it! "But still, Winifred," said the grandfather, "I cannot see how all this could relate to you—unless it were in the case—you know what I mean—we passed the spot to-day—"

"It was in that very case," replied Winifred. "He of whom I speak was firmly convinced of my innocence, at a time when, alas! so few were convinced of it! He was resolved to save me—he saw but one course to be adopted—he got himself introduced upon the jury—it was he who turned the scales entirely in my favour—it is to him that I owe my life!"

Old Barrington listened as if it were to some romance of deep awe inspiring interest: but at length he exclaimed, "Oh, Winifred, if this is all a reality it is not a man of whom you are speaking, but it is a being of a preterhuman order! Tell me, darling Winnie—is this all so?"

"I call heaven to witness," she emphatically said, "that I am telling the truth, and naught but the truth! Yes, grandfather—if it were not for that man your poor Winnie would have been separated from you for ever—she would have suffered an ignominious death—she would now be lying in the cold grave! And you, dear grandfather—"

"My heart would be broken," he faltered forth, in a voice that was tremulous with sobs. "Dear, dear Winnie! what strange things you have been telling! Why did you never let me know all this before?"

"Oh, my dear grandfather," she responded, "so long as you had your own affairs to trouble and harass you, it was not likely that I should perplex or bewilder you with matters pertaining chiefly unto myself."

"Would that the gentleman would come," cried the old man, "that I might embrace him; for I now look upon him as a benefactor and a saviour. But Ah! when I bethink me, why did you not speak to him to-day?"

"I wished you to form his acquaintance first, so that you might judge of him for yourself. Indeed, it was a very fortunate accident which threw us in his way; for I had previously made up my mind to reveal all these secrets to you this evening. But it is better that you should have first seen him, I repeat; for you learnt to like him

even before you knew that he had been your benefactor. You would not have been so well pleased if I had commenced this evening by saying to you, 'Grandfather, you are lying under illimitable obligations to one whom you do not know, whom you have never seen, and perhaps who may prove personally repulsive to you when ye meet.'"

"Yes—it is better, Winnie!" said the old man; "for now I know who my benefactor is—at least I know that I like him; and he is just the sort of person from whom one would rather receive favours and benefits. It is not far off from eight: I hope he will come."

"Rest assured that he will be punctual," replied Winifred. "Yes—for he is anxious to receive your assent, my dear grandfather—"

"Ah! ha!" said the old man, with a sly smile and an arch look. "I begin to see my way a little more clearly! There's love in the question! Well, my darling Winnie, since it is evident that this gentleman entertains the most honourable intentions—and considering that all his conduct has furnished you with so many proofs of disinterested devotion—I shall be only too glad to see you become his wife."

"A thousand thanks, dear grandfather!" ejaculated Winifred, throwing her arms about his neck: "a thousand, thousand thanks! But you must say a little more—and you must go a little further! For suppose—suppose—I scarcely know how to make the revelation—but suppose, I say, that without waiting for your assent we had—forgive me, dear grandfather!—but it is as his wife that you now embrace me!"

"His wife, Winnie?" exclaimed the old man, in the loud voice of amazement; and then in an exulting tone he added, "And why not? As well already married as intending to be! While of course my assent holds good in one case as well as in another! Ah—but you are sure, dear Winnie—"

"No more doubts, grandfather! no more suspicions!" she interrupted him; "for I know that there have been moments when—"

"Ah, that rascal Robus!" ejaculated old Barrington. "And here he is, this very day, eating roast beef and plum-pudding and swilling strong ale at my cost."

"Well, forgive him, dear grandfather," said Winnie; and then she added with a blush, and in a tremulous voice, "for appearances were certainly against me! But while you were in that horrible place, with your mind so narrowed to a particular circle of ideas—and also with so many prejudices—"

"Prejudices, Winnie?" said the old man inquiringly.

"No matter," she hastily went on to say: " suffice it for me to add that I could not—no! I could not bring myself to speak on the subject, nor to make the revelation so long as you were in that shocking place. But now, dear grandfather, that you can see things in a different light, and that your ideas are changing with your position—"

"Well, Winnie—but this marriage of your's?" interrupted the old man: "when did it take place?"

Winifred looked up with a species of playful confidence into her grandfathers' countenance; and

then from the bosom of her dress she drew forth the little velvet bag to which we have before alluded. Gliding to her workbox, she produced a pair of scissors, with which she hastily unripped the silken stitches with which the bag was sewed. First of all she drew forth a wedding-ring, which she placed upon her finger, looking up with a smile at her grandfathers, and saying, "I shall henceforth wear this altogether—and my dear husband, when he comes presently, will be so delighted to recognise it on my hand!"

"Ah, I am glad to see that emblem!" said the old man. "Not that I mistrusted you, dear Winnie, you know—only in these matters it is always so much better to have the proofs before one—"

"Ah! but I have other proofs!" ejaculated Winifred. "Mrs. Slater and Miss Evelyn were present at the ceremony—so was Mr. Wardour—and so was that very Mr. Cartwright who came to effect your release yesterday. So you see, my dear grandfather, there were plenty of witnesses; and moreover the maid-servant of the house was likewise in my confidence—but the secret has been well kept all the same—"

"Ah, indeed it has, Winnie!" said the old man. "But it shall very soon be made known; for that malignant old scoundrel Robus shan't have the opportunity—Why, what did he say to me? Something to the effect that in two or three months more you would—you know what I mean, Winnie—Ah! but now I can look forward with delight and joy to the prospect of embracing a great-grandchild!"

Winifred blushed; and with downcast looks she said, "It is close upon seven months, dearest grandfather, since I became a wife. On the twenty-first of February I gave my final consent: three days afterwards—that is to say, on the twenty-fourth—the ceremony took place by special license."

"Ah! and this is the eighteenth of September," said old Barrington. "Yes, yes—you have indeed been a wife within a few days of seven months!"

"And here is the certificate," continued Winifred, taking the document from the little velvet bag. "See! it bears the date of the twenty-fourth of February."

"But the name—the name, my dear?" said Mr. Barrington. "Why do you hold the paper—"

"Ah, my dear grandfather!" exclaimed Winifred, thrusting the certificate into her bosom; "I will not declare my husband's name until he enters this room according to your own special invitation."

"This is foolish, my dear girl," said her grandfather. "Come, tell me—"

"No—not yet!" interrupted Winifred, becoming intensely nervous as the moment of crisis approached. "Have a little patience!—it wants but five minutes to eight!—he declared to you that he would be punctual!"

"But why this mystery, Winifred?" asked the old man. "I don't like it. Surely you have wedded no one of whose name you need be ashamed?"

"It is an ancient and honourable name," responded Winifred; "and a title is connected with



it. "My husband," she added somewhat hesitatingly, "will in due course become a Baronet!"

"A Baronet? Well, that is good! But deuce take it, Winnie! you are making me uncommonly nervous! I don't know how it is—do give me a glass of wine!—there's so much mystery! A Baronet? Why, that villain Sir John Dalham——"

"There is the wine, grandfather! Drink it! it will do you good! There! the time-piece is striking eight!—Ah, and there is a double-knock at the front door! Now my husband is coming! Remember, dear grandfather, he gave us the means of buying bread!—he made your prison existence tolerable!—he saved my life!—he wooed me honourably!—honourably too he has wedded me!—a kind, a loving, and an affectionate husband is he to me!—and Oh, forget not that he is the father of the babe which I bear in my bosom!"

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Though all this was spoken with an exceeding rapidity, yet there was an irresistible pathos pervading that entire speech; and the concluding words were most interestingly powerful in their appeal.

Footsteps were heard ascending the staircase, as old Barrington exclaimed, "Who is your husband, Winnie? Name him! I see that there is something——"

"Remember, grandfather," she interjected, "that you have pronounced his conduct magnanimous and himself admirable! Let your actions justify your words!"

"Winifred, there is something in your manner that frightens me! His name——"

At this instant the door opened and the visitor made his appearance. Winifred flew towards him and flung her arms about his neck; then leading him towards her grandsire, she said in a

solemn tone, "It is God only who has the right to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children; for it were horrible and infamous for man to do so! Your blessing, then, dearest, dearest grand-sire, on the head of my husband—Roderick Dalham!"

A wild cry, or rather yell of mingled rage and excretion burst from the lips of old Barrington, at the same time that he clenched his fists and dealt himself blows the severity of which only too well indicated the violence of his emotions. Winifred clung in terror to her husband; while Dalham murmured, "I did not deserve this from him!"

All of a sudden Mr. Barrington fell down upon the carpet, and the blood which came forth from his mouth, indicated that he had broken some internal vessel in the midst of that fierce paroxysm of excitement to which he had given way.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE COTTAGE.

IT was the day following that of which we have just been writing; and in the forenoon we shall find the beautiful Agnes roaming in the neighbourhood of her own habitation. Lovely as ever did she look; while her costume, at once elegant and simple, indicated the pure gentility of her tastes. Agnes was fond of taking plenty of exercise—which indeed seems to be a habit invariably associated with well regulated minds. She rose early in the morning: the reader has already seen that when indoors she spent her time industriously with her needle, or usefully in the perusal of good books. Her's was just the disposition that would crave three or four hours of wholesome exercise daily; and this she was accustomed to take. The result was that there was always a healthful buoyancy of the spirits—a certain lightness at the heart—and a clearness of the intellect which constituted no mean elements of her happiness: while upon her cheeks there was the soft blush of the rose which the influence of the fresh air would often enhance into the richer glow of the carnation. And then, merely to look at the pure flower-grained skin of Agnes—the exquisite clearness of her complexion, without spot or blemish,—this also would add to the impression of the wholesome vigorous health enjoyed by one who loved to be in the open air, and to contemplate the beauties of nature in the varied seasons,—either when Spring scatters flowers from her brow upon the earth—or when Summer rejoices in the richness of the golden harvest—or when Autumn points invitingly to the luscious fruitage with which the trees are gemmed during the period of her sway—or when Winter weaves his fantastic fretwork of frost upon the hedges, or crystallizes his tears upon the ebony framework of the windows. Yes—in all seasons did Agnes behold something to admire. Her's was a disposition, which, fraught with æsthetic contentment, recognised all the good of the world wherever it was to be discerned, and carried within her bosom a grateful heart that never was unmindful of the great Artificer of all things.

On this particular forenoon of which we are

writing, Agnes had come forth earlier than usual; and she was wandering a little further than was her wont. But there was a brisk freshness in the air which seemed to give elasticity to her steps as well as a wholesome lightness to her heart; and it was thus that her ramble was prolonged. She was now in the open country; and at a little distance she beheld a rude, wretched, tumble-down old cottage, of so miserable an appearance that she was suddenly shocked at the idea that any human beings could possibly live in so vile a hovel. Yet that it was indeed so tenanted, her eyes received fullest proof. For in front of the cottage a girl, whose age appeared to be sixteen or seventeen, was playing gaily with a little boy—evidently her brother by the likeness; while a dog was gambolling around them both. At first Agnes was on the point of turning away, instead of drawing near enough to run the risk of her presence being regarded in the light of an intrusion: but a second glance at the little group made her alter her intention. She approached some few paces nigher: then she stopped short—and she sighed profoundly as she continued to regard that sister and her little brother. They were almost naked; and such garments as they had on, were masses of rags—so that it was a wonder they clung in festooning tatters to those forms at all.

The girl was good-looking enough to be almost called beautiful. She had long coal-black hair, large dark eyes, and a brunetta complexion: but there was nothing of the gipsy in her. Her face seemed rather of French configuration than of English,—the profile having the nose going slightly inward and defining what is called *retroussé* in France, but for which there is no adequate synonym in the English language. The expression of that countenance was a blending of vivaciousness and ingenuousness, shrewdness commingled with artlessness. The girl's mouth was well formed; and she had a set of teeth which though the least thing large, were nevertheless pure and beautiful as polished ivory. Her arms and legs were naked: they were somewhat robust, but modelled to an exact justness of proportions. Even though so miserably attired, yet there was nothing coarse nor absolutely vulgar about this girl,—nothing low or common; on the contrary, there was a something of natural gentility about her, which must irresistibly have produced upon any mind the impression that if she were only well clad and provided with the proper requisites of the toilet, she would prove a being calculated to attract and interest the observer.

Agnes now drew nearer to the group; and the little boy on beholding a stranger thus approaching, desisted from his occupation in playing with the dog. A vivid blush all in a moment appeared upon the countenance of the dark-haired damsel, as if she felt ashamed at being thus surprised in the negligence or poverty of her toilet. She turned hastily towards the cottage, as if to fly from the view of the young lady who was drawing near,—when a little girl, two or three years younger than the boy, opened the door of the hovel and came running out with extended arms towards its sister—for in this light did that young female stand towards the two children. She snatched up the little girl—imprinted a hasty kiss upon its cheek—and plunging into the cottage,

was the next moment lost to the view of Agnes. The boy had followed close upon her heels—the dog likewise had entered the dilapidated homestead—and the door was closed.

It almost seemed as if the presence of Agnes had frightened the girl and the two young children:—at all events their disappearance was effected in so sudden and abrupt a manner as to afford our amiable heroine but little encouragement to pursue the intention which a minute before she had formed—namely, to inquire into the condition and circumstances of the inhabitants of the cottage with a view to succour and relieve them according to the best of her ability. But finding that she was thus avoided, she was on the point of turning away and retreating from the spot—when the thought struck her, “Perhaps they have seen better days? perhaps it is their poverty which makes them ashamed? At all events I will not be thus easily deterred from the intention which in the first instance I had formed!”

Agnes now advanced to the door of the cottage. This door was cut in halves—so that the upper part might be opened in fine weather, while the lower part being closed, prevented children from running out and in. When Agnes knocked at the door with the handle of her parasol, the upper half was opened, but slowly and evidently with hesitation; and the *piquant* countenance of the dark-haired girl was again revealed. She said nothing: but she gazed with mingled timidity and curiosity upon the countenance of Agnes;—and now that our heroine beheld her close, she was even more than at first prepossessed in her favour—while a conviction was strengthened in her mind that the girl belonged to a family which had evidently seen better days.

“Will you suffer me to walk in and rest myself?” inquired Agnes. “I have taken somewhat a long ramble—”

“You are welcome to enter, Miss,” responded the girl; “but you will find the accommodation wretchedly bad; and in truth I am ashamed—”

Here she suddenly stopped short; and the tears started forth from her eyes.

“Don’t cry, sister Corrie,” said the boy, now approaching the girl with a look of deep concern upon his countenance; and the tears were also beginning to moisten his own cheeks.

“I would not for the world intrude upon you so as to put you to any inconvenience,” said Agnes, much touched by this scene: “I would not cause you any pain nor humiliate you; and therefore permit me at once to declare that my motive is a friendly one—and that if it lie in my power to render you a service—”

“Walk in, Miss,” said the girl, throwing open the lower half of the door; while her countenance was animated with an expression of gratitude shining above the blush which a sense of shame still kept hanging upon her cheeks.

The interior of the hut in no way belied the idea that might have been formed of it by a view of the exterior: it was in every sense of the most wretched, miserable, and poverty-stricken description. But here—before we continue the thread of our narrative—we should observe that although the girl spoke English with facility, yet that it was with a foreign accent; while a similar peculiarity was perceptible in the speech of the boy. Agnes,

was therefore now convinced that they were foreigners. She saw only those three in the cottage; and she wondered whether these poor children were orphans dwelling alone in that miserable hovel—or whether they had parents who might be absent at the time. Seating herself upon a dilapidated chair, Agnes patted the cheeks of the boy and little girl,—saying to the young female, “I need scarcely ask if these are your brother and sister?”

“Yes,” she replied. “Poor little creatures! we have no mother—and I do my best to be a mother to them!”

The girl’s bosom was swelling visibly with emotion as she thus spoke; and Agnes was for upwards of a minute so much affected that she could not give utterance to another word. At length she said—though hesitating to put the question, for fear lest it might touch upon another painful chord,—“And have you no father?”

“Yes!” ejaculated the girl; “and one of the kindest and best of fathers! But, alas! what can he do? He can obtain so little employment, and you see, Miss, that it suffices not—”

The girl stopped short—glanced rapidly over herself and the two children—and then flung her looks with equal rapidity around the room, as much as to imply that her father’s labour, whatsoever it were, would not produce sufficient to supply the bare necessities of life.

“You are not English?” said Agnes, in a soft voice of kindness.

“No, Miss,” answered the girl: “we are Italian.”

“And by what name was it that your little brother just now called you?” inquired Agnes.

“Corinna is my name,” she rejoined: “but the children, and indeed my dear father likewise, call me Corrie for brevity’s sake.”

“And might I ask,” said Agnes, “what trade or avocation your father follows?”

“He was a gentleman, Miss—a notary, or a lawyer, in his own native land,” replied Corinna. “He once had a large business, employed a great number of clerks, and was bringing up his family with respectability—pay, more, with gentility. But one of those political hurricanes which so often sweep over poor devoted Italy, annihilated the prosperity of my father all in a moment—drove him into exile—and prepared the way for all this poverty which we are now enduring.”

“Perhaps your father took a part in political matters?” said Agnes.

“Alas, yes!” responded Corinna; “my father was always a great patriot—and he had more than once sacrificed his own private interests to what he deemed the public welfare of his country. But this last blow was fatal!”

“And how happened it?” inquired Agnes, with a look and tone of the deepest sympathy and compassion.

“Oh, I will tell you, Miss!” exclaimed Corinna, with the most natural ingenuousness; for she was now getting rapidly at her ease in the presence of the amiable Agnes—while both the little boy and girl were getting rid of their shyness and were already looking upon our heroine as if she was some friend who had a right to be there. “I must tell you, Miss,” proceeded Corinna, “that we are Neapolitans by birth; and we used to live in

Naples itself. My father became involved in a political conspiracy which was headed by a great nobleman—a rich, liberal, and well-meaning man—the Count of Camerino.”

“Ah!” ejaculated Agnes: “the Count of Camerino?”

“Yes, Miss,” responded Corinna. “I see that you have heard of him?”

“Yes,” said Agnes. “I have a friend who is attached to the Embassy at the Neapolitan Court; and he became acquainted with the Count of Camerino—it was about last Christmas——”

“Ah! at the time when the Count was arrested in Naples—when his unfortunate wife drowned herself—and his son perished upon the scaffold!—Yes—my father told me all these dreadful events,” continued Corinna; “for you must know that my father is a devoted partisan of his lordship’s. Ah, Miss! you do not happen to know what has become of him?”

“No: I am unable to give you any information on that head,” replied Agnes. “It was at the beginning of the present year—in the early part of January—that his son Viscount Silvio was executed; and immediately afterwards the Count of Camerino left Naples. My friend the attaché at the Embassy has not since heard of him.”

“Ah! if we only knew where the Count might be communicated with,” observed Corinna, with a sigh, “we should not be left in this state of poverty! It is now nearly two years since my father fled from Naples: it was in the month of January, 1848—at the time of the memorable explosion of what has always been called the Camerino conspiracy——”

“That same conspiracy the discovery of which caused the Count himself to flee from Naples?” interjected Agnes. “Yes—Mr. De Vere, the friend to whom I have alluded, has frequently mentioned these circumstances in his letters. And when your father fled from Naples, he came to England, I presume?”

“Yes—we came to England,” answered Corinna; “for my mother was of English extraction,—although she had lived so many years in Italy as to be almost the same as a native. Thus when the explosion of the conspiracy compelled my father to take to flight, he resolved upon coming to England; for my mother entertained the hope of finding some of her kindred still living——”

“Ah! then your mother was alive at that time?” asked Agnes.

“Yes, Miss: she left Naples with us—but alas! scarcely had we set foot upon the English soil, when she was seized with a severe illness, which in a few weeks carried her to the grave. Oh! our advent to this country of your’s was in every sense inauspicious indeed!”—and again did the tears trickle down Corinna’s cheeks.

“And was your mother unsuccessful,” asked Agnes after a pause, and speaking in a low gentle voice, “in discovering the relatives whom she expected to find still alive in this country?”

“The inquiries that were instituted immediately after our arrival in London,” responded Corinna, “were all fruitless; and I believe—alas! I fear indeed, that disappointment on this score, added to the presentiment that poverty would overtake the family, aggravated my poor mother’s illness, and thus superadded the malady of the mind to that of

the body. Oh! indeed, Miss, we have been very very unfortunate: but still amidst all our poverty we might yet be resigned to our lot, if we were not suffering under this uncertainty in reference to my dear brother——”

“Your brother?” exclaimed Agnes, glancing at the little boy, and wondering what could possibly be the meaning of Corinna’s words.

“Oh! I do not mean this brother,” exclaimed the Neapolitan girl.

“It is brother Giulio that Corrie is talking of,” said the boy.

“You seem to think you had previously mentioned him to me,” said Agnes; “but such is not the case.”

“Ah! I thought I had mentioned Giulio’s name,” said Corinna, “when I was speaking of our flight from Naples: but I am always so disturbed the instant I approach this topic, that my mind appears to grow bewildered——”

“My poor girl,” said Agnes, “I myself should be much afflicted if I thought that you fancied all these questions on my part were being put through mere idle curiosity. No, Corinna!—but if you permit me I will be your friend! If your father will consent to accept such assistance as I may be enabled to afford——”

“Oh, Miss!” exclaimed the Italian girl, with tears again sparkling in her eyes, “how kind, how generous is all this on your part! Oh, my father would bless you!—yes, my poor afflicted parent would invoke heaven’s choicest benedictions upon your head, if you would only furnish him with the means of undertaking a journey to Florence——”

“Cheerfully will I do so,” answered Agnes. “But I should think that from all you have just been telling me it would be most dangerous for your father to set foot in Italy?”

“Danger only exists with regard to him in the Neapolitan dominions,” rejoined Corinna; “he may visit the Tuscan States in perfect security and confidence. And, Oh! if he could only once get to Florence——”

“Has he friends or relatives there?” asked Agnes.

“My brother Giulio,” responded Corinna; “for Oh, it is impossible that these misgivings so gloomy and ominous which sometimes come over my father, and which are so infectious not merely with regard to myself, but likewise in respect to these dear children,—Oh! it’s impossible, I say, that these misgivings can be well-founded”

“What is it that you apprehend?” inquired Agnes.

“Alas, that my brother Giulio may be no more!” rejoined Corinna. “I must inform you, Miss, that at the time when the Camerino conspiracy exploded in Naples in the month of January, 1848—that is about one-and-twenty months ago,—my brother Giulio, then upwards of eighteen years of age, was at the University of Padua, where he was studying for the bar. The storm which swept my father and ourselves from Naples, burst with the suddenness of a hurricane; and there was no time to communicate with Giulio. It was not until we touched at Marseilles on our way to England, that we were enabled to pen a single line to acquaint him with our flight and our safety. But alas! the same blow which ruined my father’s fortunes, dealt destruction to the hopes of Giulio’s own

career. He left the University, at which my father was no longer able to maintain him: he would not join us in England—he was afraid of becoming a burden upon whatsoever resources might remain at our command: he vowed that he would earn his own bread—and that if need were, he would even supply the wants of those who were dear to him. He became a valet in the family of a Florentine nobleman; and from that family he shortly after passed into the service of a lady of rank, also residing in Florence—the Marchioness di Mirano. For some months poor Giulio regularly transmitted a sum of money; but all of a sudden remittances and letters alike ceased. This was in the month of February last. Yes—it is now upwards of seven months since we received any tidings from Giulio! My father has written to the Marchioness di Mirano—but has received no answer. Hence he concludes that her ladyship is utterly ignorant of what has become of Giulio, and will not condescend, or else will not take the trouble, to pen a few lines to this effect. And now, Miss, you can understand why we entertain such misgivings in reference to poor Giulio, and why my father would look upon you as an angel sent from heaven if you would only assist him with the means to visit Florence and inquire what has become of his first-born."

"Oh, this I will most cheerfully do!" exclaimed Agnes. "But has not your father written to any one else in Florence besides this Marchioness of whom you speak?"

"He has written to the Minister of Police," replied Corinna; "but his letter has experienced no better fate than the half-dozen which he has so entreatingly penned to the Marchioness. The Tuscan Minister will not condescend to answer a Neapolitan fugitive, whose name has been circulated throughout Italy in the same list with all the other leaders of the Camerino conspiracy."

"And what—if the question be not an indiscreet one," said Agnes,—"what is your father's name?"

"Paoli," responded Corinna. "But we were speaking of my brother Giulio. Ah! if you had ever seen him, Miss, you would not be surprised that we all used to feel as proud of him as we loved him. He was a perfect model of masculine beauty, with hair of raven darkness—yes, and even more soft and glossy than mine!" added Corinna, not speaking thus from any sentiment of vanity, but in the ingenuousness which wondered that the hair of a man should rival in delicacy of texture that of a woman.

"Let us hope," said Agnes, "that nothing serious has occurred to your brother, and that his silence will in due time be satisfactorily accounted for. I hope that he has taken warning from his father's example, and not engaged in any conspiracy."

"This is by no means likely," answered Corinna: "he is quite of a different disposition. But I am speaking of him as if he still lived: whereas, alas! I fear——"

Here she stopped short; and again did the tears trickle from her eyes—while her brother and little sister clung to the tattered skirt of her dress, and looked in silent affliction up into her countenance.

"Do not apprehend the worst," said Agnes. "As I have already promised, the means shall be immediately forthcoming to enable your father to

pay a visit to Florence. But I may possibly have it in my power to assist you in another manner. I have already told you that I have a friend holding a diplomatic situation at the Neapolitan Court; I know that he will interest himself in anything wherein I may crave his intervention; and at my request he would therefore write to the British Embassy at Florence and cause inquiries to be made relative to your brother Giulio."

"Oh, dear young lady!" exclaimed Corinna, "how can I possibly express my gratitude?—what will my father feel?—what will he say? Oh, Miss! you have infused joy into my heart; and I now long for the return of my parent that I may communicate to him how an angel has been in our humble cot!"

"Where is your father?" inquired Agnes: "and when do you expect him to return?"

"Sometimes," answered Corinna, with a blush mantling upon her countenance, "my poor father obtains some little translations to accomplish—or he meets with refugee friends who are better off than himself—But Oh, Miss! it is a sad, sad existence to lead!"

"Doubtless, my poor girl—and Oh, I pity you!" said Agnes, in a voice tremulous with emotion.

"Ah, Miss! you would indeed pity us even more than the extent to which your commiseration now reaches, if you knew all!" resumed Corinna. "But good God!" she suddenly exclaimed, "look at this hovel—this vile sordid hut in which we have been compelled to take refuge, and where we endeavour as much as possible to hide our rags and our poverty! For we still have our little pride, Miss," added the girl, her bosom swelling proudly and the big tears standing in her eyes. "We were gently born and tenderly reared; and Oh! even though for months past we have known this bitter, bitter penury, yet we are not so accustomed to it as to display our rags with hardihood and confront the world with the brezen looks of utter desperation! But listen while I give you a few details. My father, though doing a large business, and deriving a respectable income from his affairs, was not a rich man: that is to say, he had very little in the shape of hoarded money—for his politics had often and often involved him in trouble, so that fines and amercements had periodically swept away whatsoever savings he accumulated. And then, too, the business of a notary was to lend money upon mortgage and other securities; and thus when the sudden blow came at the commencement of last year, he was only enabled to flee from Naples with a moderate sum of money. My poor mother's illness was a costly one, considering our limited means; for my father spared no expense to obtain the best medical attendance which the British metropolis could afford. Thus, by the time that my mother sank into the cold grave, our means were very nearly exhausted. My poor father went everywhere in search of employment: he was willing to do anything that was honourable in order to earn bread for his children. But you may conceive how difficult it is for an Italian gentleman to procure any remunerative work in a capital where in every counting-house doing business with foreign parts, there are competent clerks to maintain a correspondence in the different Continental languages. Thus, Miss, as I have already

told you, the employment which my father could succeed in obtaining, has been limited, precarious, and utterly inadequate for the respectable sustenance of his family. Our descent has been gradient, and only too sure. From lodging to lodging, each one humbler than the former, have we been as it were driven,—until we found ourselves reduced to almost the rags of beggary. And our pride, Miss, has induced us to flee from the great city and to conceal ourselves in this hovel. Oh! for myself I care not: I do not repine—I would submit to any lot! But—but—”

Here the poor girl could restrain her emotions no longer; and she burst into a violent flood of weeping. Her little brother and sister wept likewise; and the reader may be assured that the eyes of our amiable heroine did not remain unmoistened.

“I am not rich,” said Agnes, “but all that I can do for you shall be done. You are a young lady, Corinna—and you will give me credit for the wish to accomplish all I can do in as delicate a manner as possible. Take this purse—be not shocked nor offended—endeavour to look upon me as a friend whom you have known some time, and who exercises the right of assisting you—nay, more, who only performs a duty in rendering that succour which a comparative affluence enables her to afford.”

Miss Evelyn's purse happened to contain a bank-note for five pounds and some five or six sovereigns, besides silver: but its contents were not known to Corinna until after the benefactress had departed. The Italian girl took the purse; and sinking upon her knees, she pressed to her lips the hand which gave it. The two little children, though not rightly understanding, the scene that was taking place, nevertheless instinctively imitated their sister's example, and went down likewise upon their knees. Agnes was profoundly affected: she raised them all three;—she was in the act of embracing them, when the door opened, and a man made his appearance. The ejaculations which burst from the lips of Corinna and the little ones, at once revealed to Agnes that this was their father, Signor Paoli.

He was about fifty years of age: his hair was streaked with grey—he had once been good-looking—but his countenance was wrinkled with affliction, and had a sad careworn look. His attire was excessively shabby and threadbare; but it had a certain air of neatness. It was through no selfish motive that he provided himself with shoes while his children were shoeless: for upon the circumstance of his maintaining even the smallest degree of a respectable appearance depended the contingency of his procuring bread to put into the mouths of his offspring.

The scene before him at once made him aware that an angel had entered into his hut; and assuredly no angel from heaven could have descended in a lovelier shape! The little children flew to him in a manner which convinced Agnes that his character had not been exaggerated when she received the assurance that he was a good father: Corinna likewise bounded towards him, displaying the purse and pointing to Agnes—but the poor girl's heart was too full to allow her tongue to give utterance to a syllable.

“Whoever you may be, excellent young lady!” said Signor Paoli, turning towards Agnes, and ad-

dressing her in very good English, but with a foreign accent—and his voice trembled with emotion,—“you have this day done something which will not be forgotten by Him who is the giver of all bounties. Not!—and assuredly it never can be forgotten by us! I came home in despair—and you have filled my heart with joy! I came to announce to my poor children that I had brought no bread to give them—and I find that you have bestowed your charity with a bounteous hand! I came to tell them that we must all lie down and die together, or adopt the hateful expedient of mendicancy; and you have bidden us live—aye, and what is more, you have saved us from that crowning degradation! Tell me your name that I may bless it!”

Agnes was weeping softly—for there was a most touching pathos in this scene, and all the more so on account of the evident sincerity, the genuine feeling, and the heartfelt emotion with which Paoli spoke. She wiped away her tears; and she gave Paoli her card,—saying, “Your daughter will tell you all that I have proposed in reference to your son Giulio. Come to me to-morrow, and let us discuss the subject at our leisure.”

She was then about to hasten from the hut; but Corinna detained her, exclaiming, “Oh let me have the happiness of telling my father in your presence what you have so generously proposed to do in reference to Giulio! Father,” she continued, perceiving that Agnes consented to remain, “this angel whom heaven has sent us in the hour of our bitter need, will give you the means of visiting Florence; and she has a friend at the British Embassy at Naples, who will use his influence with the Embassy at the Tuscan Court, to cause inquiries to be instituted concerning my dear brother!”

Paoli could only take our heroine's hand and press it in his own; for it was now his turn to have a heart too full to permit the expression of the feelings from the lips. But then a cloud came over his countenance; and he said, after a long silence, “My duty towards my son prompts me to use every exertion to clear up the mystery which at present shrouds his fate: but on the other hand there is a duty which I must perform towards these unprotected ones!”—and he glanced with tearful eyes upon his children.

“Let not this latter consideration trouble you, Signor,” said Agnes; “for I have something to propose. Corinna shall come and live with me during your absence. She shall be my friend and companion—I will treat her as if she were my sister. As for these little ones, they too shall find an asylum at my house. The boy shall go to school: there is a seminary in the neighbourhood, where he may be a day-scholar; and every care shall be taken of him, as well as of this poor child!”—and she patted the little girl caressingly upon the cheek.

It were impossible to find words to depict the joy—the almost incredulously wild delight, which seized upon the exiled family as these generous announcements met their ears.

“Down upon your knees, my dear children!” exclaimed Paoli; “upon your knees, and thank our benefactress!”—and he himself was about to sink into that suppliant posture when Agnes prevented him.

"No," she said, resolutely; "this is a homage which must not be offered to a mortal like yourselves! I am but doing towards you that which I know you would do towards me if I myself were in distress. And now I leave you. Think over all I have said—and come to me to-morrow."

Agnes now issued rapidly from the cottage, followed by the benedictions of those into whose hearts she had infused so much happiness. As she sped away from that hovel, she experienced all the sweets of having performed a good action. But, Oh! how few, how very few would have acted in a similar manner! Many, on first beholding the group at the door as at the outset it presented itself to the observation of Agnes, would have turned away without thinking to inquire into the circumstances of the poverty of which there were only too visible evidences. Some might have inquired—and they would have contented themselves with doling forth a few pence, or perhaps a little modicum of silver: but as for conferring any really useful bounty, or proffering more substantial aid, scarcely one out of a million would have adopted such a course. O Agnes! thou didst indeed stand forth in brilliant contrast with the great majority of thy fellow-creatures! Not only wast thou the personification of Beauty, but likewise of Charity—that noblest and yet meekest of virtues! And while in other parts of the world, thy cousin Floribel, as the personification of Pleasure, was revelling in the midst of voluptuous enjoyments and depraved delights,—thou wast pursuing thy career of holy and unostentatious excellence, flinging the bright beams of hope upon the troubled ocean of humanity, as the pure chaste moon casts its streak of light upon the dark tempestuous sea!

But there was some one who had been all the while watching Agnes from a distance. He had followed her in her ramble—but keeping so far behind, and tracking her with such caution, as to remain unperceived by her. He had seen her enter the cottage—he had remained concealed amongst some trees at a little distance—he had lingered in his hiding-place during the hour that she tarried beneath that humble roof—and he had marked her go forth again. He had not accosted her: he did not emerge from behind the trees; and as she passed near the spot where he was thus concealed—she suspecting not that any one was there—he discerned upon her countenance that expression of mingled joy and sadness which naturally arose from the state of her feelings,—joy to think that she should have been enabled to infuse happiness into the hearts of the refugee family, and sadness because of the woes to the recital of which she had been a listener. The person concealed behind the trees, was a thorough man of the world—accustomed to fathom the human heart at a glance: and he comprehended that this angelic expression on the lady's features indicated the performance of a good deed. He wept! Yes—the tears flowed down his cheeks; and he murmured some words in eulogistic apostrophe to that angel as she passed.

But she heard them not—neither did he intend that she should hear them: nor came he forth from his hiding place until she was lost to his view.

Then he emerged from that spot and bent his way towards the cottage. He was a tall man: he

was dressed in black—he seemed to be of middle age—and it would have required not a very careful study of his countenance to inform the observer that he had been acquainted with much care. On arriving at the cottage door, he beheld a scene which was only too well calculated to effect the heart of even the most callous and cynical. Paoli was seated, with his little children upon his knees,—while his daughter Corinna was standing by his side, with her arm thrown round his neck.

"The name of our benefactress is Miss Evelyn," that refugee parent was saying at the moment. "Let this name never be forgotten in your prayers, dear children! You, my little ones, are too young to know what would have happened to us all if that beautiful lady had not come. Although belonging to this earth, yet she is as good as an angel; and when you read, or speak, or think of angels, you may believe that in their spirit-form they are like unto her who has so recently left us!"

Paoli was speaking in the English language, which the refugees had for some time past agreed to adopt as their own,—not merely that they might improve themselves in it as much as possible, but likewise because Paoli himself had long apprehended that he should never again visit his native land—that his children would therefore have in course of time to think of getting their living in England, for which purpose they must as it were become naturalized on English soil as much as possible. Therefore the habit of speaking in the language of this clime had become a settled one with them; and indeed the youngest child was almost entirely unacquainted with the Italian tongue. Thanks to the fact of the emigrants thus using the English language, the words that Paoli was so earnestly and pathetically addressing to his children were intelligible to the listener who had stolen unperceived to the half-open door of the cottage.

When Paoli had ceased speaking, that stranger pushed the door completely open, and made his appearance. He had already heard enough to convince him that the opinion he had previously formed in respect to Agnes Evelyn's visit to the cottage, was the correct one. The rapid glance which he flung round upon the countenances that he was now enabled to discern, plainly showed him how interesting were the features and looks of the refugee family.

"Pardon me for this intrusion," he said; "and believe me when I at once assure you that my object in coming hither is very far from being connected with any impertinent curiosity."

"We have this day received proof of the existence of so much goodness in human nature," answered Paoli, "that I can assure you we are in no humour to view any one with mistrust."

"Thank you for that assurance," responded the stranger. "I perceive that you are not natives of this clime?"

"We are Italians," answered Paoli,—"driven from our own country by political persecution. I am a gentleman by birth—but I was well-nigh coming to the mendicant's fate if it had not been for the noble generosity of a young lady whom accident just now brought hither. Ah! sir, she is indeed an angel! She has not merely assisted us

—for her bounty is indeed equivalent to a fortune to beings who but an hour back had not the means of purchasing bread!—but she has likewise proffered a home to my children while I go forth into the world in search of a son whom I have lost.”

“It is indeed an angel only who could have done all this!” ejaculated the stranger emphatically; while his lip quivered with the emotions that he experienced. “But tell me your tale; and believe me when I reiterate the assurance that I am not inspired by any motive of impertinent curiosity. Nay, more, I may conscientiously declare that when accident should have likewise brought my steps—as it was doing—to this abode, I should have endeavoured to afford such succour as my means would permit. And perhaps even now I may be allowed to add the mite of my own philanthropic feeling to the more substantial benefits conferred by the young lady who has so recently left you?”

Signor Paoli was convinced of the genuine kindness of the stranger’s heart and the perfect sincerity of his language; and he accordingly hesitated not to tell his tale—which he did in pretty nearly the same terms as his daughter Corinna had already told it to Agnes. The stranger listened with the deepest attention; and he seemed to be affected when the refugee acquainted him with all the details of Agnes Evelyn’s kindness,—how she purposed to supply him with the means of journeying to Florence, and how she had offered an asylum at Sidney Villa to Corinna and the little ones.

“And now,” said the stranger, “you must permit me to offer you some little assistance. I am not rich, or I would do more: but this bank-note—I must beg of you to accept it—”

“Generous Englishman!” exclaimed the Italian refugee; “if I accept this proof of your noble philanthropy and friendship, it will be for the purpose of sparing the necessity of drawing too heavily upon the bounty of the amiable young lady who has so recently taken her departure. And suffer me to consider this amount,” he went on to say, glancing at the bank-note, which was for five pounds, “as a loan which, if ever fortune should again favour me, I shall meet honourably and punctually repay: for never yet has there been the slightest shade of mean or dishonourable conduct associated with the name of Sexto Paoli!”

“Paoli?” said the stranger: “Paoli? Is that your name?”—and he looked as if he fancied that he was not now hearing it for the first time.

“Yes,” responded the Neapolitan, “that is my name. It has been branded by a vile tyrannical government—but it has never been disgraced!”

The stranger appeared to be reflecting with the air of one who was endeavouring to collect certain recollections of the past; and after a pause he asked, “What was the name of the English family with which your wife was connected, and concerning whom she hoped to obtain some tidings when setting foot on the English soil?”

“The name of that family was Morton,” answered Paoli. “But wherefore do you inquire?”

“You have that card before you,” continued the stranger, pointing to the one which Agnes had left; “and you behold there the name of Evelyn. Did you ever hear that name mentioned before to-day?”

“I do not remember that I ever did,” answered Paoli. “But why this question? You must have some motive—”

“Think! reflect!” interrupted the stranger: “did you never by any accident hear the names of Morton and Evelyn associated?”

“Ah! now that you mention it,” exclaimed Paoli, as a light seemed to be dawning in unto his memory, “I do really think that I have heard my poor deceased wife mention those names in association. Morton Evelyn?—Morton Evelyn?”—and Paoli repeated them once or twice, as if to convince himself that they were indeed not altogether unfamiliar to his ear.

“Father,” said Corinna, “I assuredly remember to have heard the combined names of Morton and Evelyn issue from the lips of my poor deceased mother. It even struck me just now, the moment I glanced at Miss Evelyn’s card, that the name was not unknown to me.”

“True, my child!” ejaculated Paoli: “your mother did indeed mention the name of Evelyn on one or two occasions! And now it occurs to me that she one day explained how the family of the Mortons, from which she herself descended, had intermarried with that of the Evelyns, and thus the names had become associated. But the fact is, sir,” continued Paoli, turning towards the stranger, “it was very seldom that my poor wife alluded to her family, until the time when calamity decided us upon visiting this country; for she had married without their consent—they had treated her unkindly—many long years had elapsed during which all intercourse was broken off betwixt herself and her relations in England—and she neither sought nor obtained any information of them at all. But when misfortune rendered us exiles, my poor wife thought that if ever there were a time when there should be forgiveness and reconciliation, it was at such a period as that; and she had the idea that the Morton family, which was formerly numerous enough, could not possibly be extinct. Indeed she expected to learn that there were several scions living, and that they were flourishing in their pecuniary circumstances. But alas! in all these hopes was she disappointed! Vain were the inquiries which I instituted:—the Mortons for whom I sought and whom I expected to find in the mercantile world, were not to be found! But again let me ask why have you given the conversation this turn which it has taken? Strange, and even solemnly interesting would be the coincidence—yet Oh, how providentially appropriate!—if that angel who bears the name of Evelyn, happened to be a descendant of those Evelyns with whom the Mortons intermarried!”

“And that coincidence has taken place!” rejoined the stranger emphatically. “Yes—it is so! Agnes Evelyn, who came to you in the guise of a ministering angel, is the daughter of a certain Morton Evelyn who must assuredly have been your wife’s cousin.”

“Then Miss Evelyn, who visited us just now,” exclaimed Corinna, “is to some little extent a connexion! Oh, we might almost claim her as a relative!—and what happiness to be able to regard her as a being who is at all events very different from a perfect stranger!”

“Yes,” said the English gentleman; “there is



undoubtedly a certain kinship, though remote, betwixt yourselves and Agnes Evelyn."

"But you, sir," exclaimed Paoli, gazing upon the stranger with astonishment and curiosity,—"who may you be, that you are enabled to communicate this intelligence?—from what source gleaned you your knowledge?"

"Listen," said the stranger; "and I will give you a few words of explanation."

He then spoke confidentially to Signor Paoli and Corinna: but what the nature of his discourse was, we need not explain at this precise point of our narrative. Suffice it to say that after having remained for upwards of an hour at the little hut, the stranger took leave of the refugee family,—a complete understanding of some kind or another now subsisting between them.

No. 49.—AGNES.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

CORINNA.

SUITABLE raiment was speedily obtained by Signor Paoli for his family; and on the following day they all presented themselves at Sidney Villa. They experienced from Agnes the kindest reception; they testified towards her their own heartfelt gratitude—but they did not make the slightest allusion to the fact of the discovery that a certain degree of kinship subsisted between them and the young lady. No—nor was any reference made to the stranger through whom that fact had been revealed to their knowledge.

We need hardly say that Paoli accepted with

the sincerest thankfulness all the propositions which had been made to him by Agnes. He agreed that Corinna and the little ones should accept the asylum so generously offered them by our heroine, while he resolved to set off at once to Florence to institute inquiries in reference to his lost son Giulio. He would only accept a very moderate sum from the hands of Agnes,—assuring her that the expenses of travelling were far less than they really were; because it did not suit his purpose to avow the fact that from the hand of another he had received a sum that would materially help to defray the cost he was about to incur. He warmly embraced his children—he poured forth over and over again the assurances of his gratitude to Miss Evelyn—and he took his departure.

A most interesting girl was Corinna Paoli, now that she was attired in apparel suiting the gentility of her birth. But still she chose to dress herself with the greatest simplicity; yet in that very plainness there was a good taste bordering almost upon elegance. The raven darkness of her hair was set off by the neat lace cap which she wore; and as she was accustomed to arrange her hair in bands, it looked like a smooth ebony frame for her sweet interesting countenance. Happiness now danced in her large dark eyes; and smiles were upon the scarlet lips, which, when parted, displayed teeth of ivory whiteness. Her age was between seventeen and eighteen; and she looked no older—for she had not the precocity which is so common a characteristic of the daughters of the sunny South: and perhaps in her case the difference arose from the fact that she had English blood rolling in her veins; and indeed, through the maternal parent, was half of Saxon origin. Her brother and little sister were not merely marvelously improved by the raiment which had displaced their rags—but they too were blithe and happy. The boy attended a neighbouring school at which he was placed as a day-boarder: that is to say, he went thither immediately after breakfast in the morning, and remained until tea-time in the evening. As for the little girl, she was too young to go to school at present; so she remained entirely at the villa—chiefly in the care of the worthy Rachel, who had conceived a great affection for her.

But was Corinna altogether happy? When the light was dancing in her large dark eyes, and the sunny smiles were wreathing her lips,—was there not the slightest drawback to the perfection of her felicity? Yes!—for her uncertainty in reference to her brother's fate—that brother whom she had so fondly loved—was naturally calculated to throw a shade upon her soul. But was there naught beside?—was there in her mind no other image the contemplation of which was accompanied with a sigh? Again do we answer with a Yes:—but in order that the events which are to follow may be better understood, we must give some explanatory details in reference to the point to which we are now alluding.

It was only for a few weeks past that the refugee family had been compelled to seek an asylum at that wretched hut where we first found them. Indeed, it has been already said that they moved from lodging to lodging, each one humbler than the former. Therefore if we were to look

back some seven or eight months, we should then find that they were still the occupants of quarters that might be termed decent and comfortable, although of very humble description. In a word, the family at that time dwelt in a couple of ready furnished rooms on one of the higher storeys of a house in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square. Now, as many of our readers are doubtless aware, that neighbourhood is a favourite one for foreigners of all nations; and thus nearly every house in the same street was let out in lodgings to Frenchmen, Italians, Germans, Hungarians, or Poles, most of whom had been compelled to fly from their respective countries on account of the political affairs of the preceding year 1848—for let it be now borne in mind that we are at present writing of the year 1849.

At the beginning of this same year of 1849, the Paoli family were occupying the lodgings near Leicester Square to which we have just alluded, when towards the end of February a little incident occurred that must be here mentioned. Corinna had remarked that the first floor of the house precisely opposite, had been to let ever since she had known the street: but now at length the bill was one morning taken down from the window. It was therefore evident that a lodger had arrived at last. And it was not long before Corinna saw the lodger himself; for at the window she beheld a young man of the most prepossessing appearance. He was evidently a foreigner; and her father, the first time he beheld the individual, pronounced him to be a Frenchman. He was well dressed, and by his appearance was a personage of distinction,—though on the other hand it was scarcely supposed he could be well off, inasmuch as it was by no means a street which any person having large resources would pitch upon as the place of his residence. Still he might be supposed to have a moderate competency, and quite enough to maintain him decently,—as was inferred from the fact of his having taken the first floor of that house.

Corinna soon became aware that the young Frenchman had noticed her at the window of her own room: for innocent and artless though the young damsel were, yet she could not be altogether ignorant that she was good-looking; and as on her own side she was assuredly somewhat interested in the young foreigner from the very first moment that she obtained a glimpse of him from the casement, she was led from this very circumstance to suspect that he entertained a kindred feeling with reference to herself and the relatives with whom she was living. She now peeped more timidly and more diffidently from her own window: but on nearly every occasion she saw the young man—until at length a thought began to take possession of her mind that he purposely remained for hours at his window in order to be sure to catch a glimpse of her whenever she should appear at her own. When he issued forth to take his walks—which he did with tolerable regularity—he always looked up at the window of the Neapolitan refugees' lodgings; and thus Corinna could not possibly doubt but that she herself had become an object of interest for that young gentleman.

Thus four or five weeks had passed away, and Corinna had not once met the lodger of the opposite house. She had not seen him nearer than at his

window or in the street; and yet the feeling was irresistibly growing in her heart that there was a secret sympathy establishing itself between them. She could scarcely understand it: she was too innocent,—too pure-minded—too little accustomed to suffer her imagination to run wild on the wing of conjecture in search of the solutions of mysteries! But at length that feeling to which we have alluded increased in its spontaneous growth to such an extent as to amount to a positive conviction of the existence of a strong sympathy between the two. Corinna once or twice casually asked her father if he knew anything of their opposite neighbour?—but he replied in the negative. He had no curiosity—it was not at all likely he would make any inquiry upon the point:—indeed he was ignorant of the very name of the individual.

One day Signor Paoli was unwell and unable to leave his room. He required some little necessities, which Corinna went forth to purchase,—leaving him to take care of the little ones. She now for the first time met the object of her secret sympathy. A closer view justified the favourable impression she had formed of his personal appearance. He was exceedingly handsome—his manners were elegant—and there was about him that unmistakable air of distinction which denoted the individual accustomed to the very best society. Poor Corinna was seized with a confusion which amounted almost to shame; for the thought flashed to her mind that she was poorly clad, though still her attire was very far from being so wretched as it subsequently became at the time when we first introduced her to our readers. She had occasionally found herself secretly longing to meet that young gentleman, if only to assure herself that he was precisely what her fancy had pictured him from a distance: but now the wish was gratified, she felt as if she could desire the earth would suddenly open and swallow her up. But all this timidity vanished, and her cheeks glowed with the animation of another feeling which sent a thrill of delight through her heart, when the young gentleman, making her a bow replete with the most friendly courtesy, attempted with all possible respect, remarked upon the state of the weather, or threw out some such observation by means of which one stranger usually endeavours to get into discourse with another. He spoke in French, which Corinna understood sufficiently to enable her to answer him,—when he, at once perceiving that she was not a fellow-countrywoman, ejaculated, "You must be an Italian, if I may judge by your accent?" She replied in the affirmative; and then her natural propriety suggested that it would be indiscreet to linger in conversation with him there. She therefore bowed and hurried on. But now the ice was broken between them; and every morning when Corinna approached her window, the young Frenchman was stationed at his own casement opposite to repeat the bow of friendly courtesy with which he had first introduced himself. Thus six weeks passed away: and Corinna's gentle heart unmistakably acknowledged the impression which the young French stranger had made upon it.

A second time they met. Corinna was again alone; and on this occasion she permitted the young Frenchman to walk by her side. She felt

assured that he was a refugee from his own country, as her father was from Naples; and in the guilelessness of her soul she felt as if this circumstance warranted the dispensation with those cold formalities which ought to precede the acquaintance of two young persons. Besides, the conviction was now strong in her mind that their *did* exist a certain sympathy between them, though she could not thus explain it to herself—much less could she have shaped it in words, if questioned upon the point. In the course of conversation the young Frenchman informed her that he was indeed a refugee,—thus corroborating her surmise. He stated that he had recently been in Italy, and that on his return to France he had unfortunately fallen in with three or four gentlemen who belonged to a secret Socialist society. He went on to explain that he was totally averse to all political plottings—that he had nothing to do with the intrigues of his new friends—and that he was even ignorant of the perilous designs on which they were bent. But one day he received a private intimation from a relative who was a clerk of high standing at the Prefecture of Police,—to the effect that he was looked on with suspicion by the authorities, that the knowledge which the government had obtained of a secret conspiracy's existence threatened most seriously to compromise him, and that if he did not at once leave Paris with all possible despatch he would assuredly be transported to Cayenne. Aware of the remorseless proceedings which Louis Napoleon (then President of the French nation) was adopting towards all persons who stood in his way, the young gentleman had at once followed the friendly counsel of his relative, and had taken to flight. To add to his misfortunes, a notary who had the management of the greater portion of his property was similarly compromised, and was compelled likewise to flee,—leaving the affairs of all his clients in a state of the most deplorable confusion. Thus proscribed for an offence of which he was utterly innocent, and nearly ruined in purse, the young Frenchman, hitherto rich and accustomed to revel in every luxury, found himself an impoverished refugee in a foreign land. Such was the statement which he gave to Corinna,—adding that his name was Edgar Marcellin.

On her own side Corinna gave some explanations—but her's were more brief. She mentioned that her father's name was Paoli—that he had fled with his family from Naples upwards of a year previously—that her mother had recently died—and that she had a brother who had remained in Italy. But she did not happen to mention that his Christian name was Giulio; while through shame or false modesty—let the reader call it which he will—she kept back the circumstance that he had quitted the University at Padua to accept a menial situation as the means of independently earning his own bread. Now, it will be here convenient for the reader's sake if we mention two or three little facts. Edgar Marcellin was the same who had intrigued with Ciprina at Florence and who had fled suddenly from that city in consequence of the threat of the Marchioness Lucrezia di Mirano to denounce him as the murderer of the page Giulio. In conversing with Corinna, he mentioned none of these names; he merely said in a general way that he had been travelling in

Italy—he did not specify Florence as having been the principal place of his sojourn when in that country. We must likewise add that when in Florence, he had never happened to learn Giulio's surname of *Paoli*: he had merely known the youth as simple *Giulio*. Thus, after the interchange of explanations between himself and Corinna, she was as far from suspecting as he himself was that it was her own brother whom he had encountered in Florence, whom he had known as a page there, and of whose assassination the Marchioness di Mirano had accused him, accompanying that accusation with the threat that forced him to so speedy a flight.

On half-a-dozen subsequent occasions, while they still dwelt in the same street in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, did Edgar Marcellin and Corinna meet: but these interviews were always brief and hurried—for the young girl dared not remain too long away from her home. She did not mention the meetings to her father,—simply from the fact that the maiden coyness of a first love put its seal upon her lips. Marcellin gave her to understand that he loved her, though without any positive and formal avowal—either because, however loose his principles might be when he fell in with such a woman as Ciprina, he was not sufficiently heartless to study deliberately the seduction of an innocent confiding creature such as Paoli's daughter—or else because, if he did really entertain honourable intentions, he must have felt that situated as they both were, it was not an opportune period for revealing them. Nevertheless, he was assuredly enamoured of the girl; and thus he could not help to a certain extent betraying his feelings.

But now something occurred which was suddenly and sternly to separate the lovers. The remittances from Giulio had for some time ceased; and Paoli one evening informed Corinna that they could no longer afford to live in their present lodgings—that he had taken others in a cheaper neighbourhood—and that they must remove at once. This was a sad blow to the poor girl: but when she burst into tears, her father naturally fancied that her grief was merely occasioned by this fresh indication of their descent in the pathway of poverty. Their little packages were soon arranged, and the refugee family went away on foot to a quarter of the metropolis at least a couple of miles distant from that which they had just left. Edgar Marcellin's windows were at the time dark—for he did not dine at home, and was passing the evening elsewhere. Thus when he went to his window in the morning, to pay his usual salutation to Corinna, he beheld not the accustomed beautiful face at the casement. He soon learnt the truth: the Neapolitan refugees were gone—and he could not ascertain to which part of the multitudinous Babylon they had removed.

It was, as we have said, a sad blow to Corinna: the occupation that had afforded a soft innocent pleasure to her gentle guileless heart, was gone! She could no longer look from her window to behold a handsome sympathizing countenance opposite: she could no longer hurry forth on some domestic errand with the certainty of meeting one who had made a strong impression upon her mind! But still all hope was not dead within her. She thought that by some means Edgar Marcellin

would discover her present residence:—in her innocence she little knew how unlikely this was, unless by some strange accident, amidst the mazes of the huge metropolis. And that accident did not occur. She thought of writing to Edgar Marcellin—but she dared not. On what ground could she address him? Her heart had told her at the time that he loved her: but now she began to doubt it. He had never openly avowed himself; and she fancied that he could not possibly be making any attempt to find her out, or else he must succeed. Then, at the expiration of a few weeks, fresh indications of the downward descent presented themselves; and the refugee family removed to a still remoter and poorer lodging. Poverty smote sterner blows and became more and more visible,—more and more developing its lean, gaunt, ghastly, spectral shape! Another removal to a still poorer neighbourhood and a still meaner abode—and the last remaining garments of Corinna and her little brother and sister began to fritter into rags. Yes!—and these were rags which soon defied all her thrift and labour—all her skill with the needle—to prevent them from becoming so. Then, while stifling a convulsive sob at the thought of Edgar Marcellin, poor Corinna would try to persuade herself that she ought to rejoice that he did not see her, now clothed in penury's garb as she was—fallen from even the last semblance of gentility, save and except in reference to that natural air of distinction which no rage could completely conceal. Indeed, to this state of mind the poor girl was evidently reëigning herself; so that at last she came to look upon her brief acquaintance with Edgar Marcellin as something as shadowy as a bygone dream that never could come back.

Then ensued the last descent in the downward path, and the poor refugees found an asylum in the wretched hut where we first introduced them to the reader. And now they were in utter rags—with the exception of the father, who for the reason which we have already set forth, managed to keep himself as presentable as possible, for fear lest he should lose the last chance of obtaining bread for his children. But from that state of misery the refugees were redeemed by the accidental visit of Agnes Evelyn to their abode,—and having given these requisite explanations, we may now resume the thread of our narrative.

Corinna, installed beneath the hospitable roof of Sidney Villa, found herself well clothed and felt that she was a lady once again. Now if she were to meet Edgar Marcellin, she should not be ashamed! Her heart throbbed at the idea; and every time she went out to walk with Agnes—especially when their rambles extended to any distance towards the West End of London—she thought it probable that she might encounter him who was again uppermost in her mind. But no! she beheld him not. Might she not now write to him? Alas, no! for again recurred the question, What ground had she for doing so? Besides, she could not ask him to call upon her at Sidney Villa: she could not take such a liberty with the dwelling of her friend and benefactress;—and her natural sense of propriety shrank from the thought of appointing a meeting elsewhere. She could therefore do nothing: but she frequently caught herself sighing silently and inwardly, as the secret voice of her soul breathed the name of Edgar Marcellin.

Nearly a month had elapsed since the departure of Signor Paoli for Florence; and it was now about the middle of October. One day—the weather being remarkably fine, with a sun as bright and an atmosphere as genial as if the seasons had made a mistake and Spring had caught up the sceptre of declining Autumn—Agnes and Corinna walked out together. The little boy was at school, as usual; the little girl was playing in the garden under the eye of the good-hearted Rachel. The two young ladies walked round the Regent's Park, and then began to bend their steps homeward. Just as they were issuing from the Park, Corinna was recognised by a young man who was a little way behind. She happened to turn her head for a moment: he caught a glimpse of her countenance—he knew her in an instant—for this was Edgar Marcellio. But she perceived him not; and even if she had, she might have been excused if she failed to recognise him so speedily as he had known her. For he was much altered:—he had shaven off the moustache which was wont to set off his upper lip, and the beard which had given so manly a finish to his remarkably handsome face. His garments were shabby: there was a poverty-stricken air about him: it was no longer the brilliant and fashionable Edgar Marcellio whom we first introduced to our readers in the gorgeous saloons of the Mirano mansion at Florence: it was the young Frenchman in a decayed and fallen condition! But yet his toilet indicated the desperate struggle of a gentleman to maintain as much neatness as possible, and to conceal to the utmost of his power the presence of that poverty which had fastened its hand upon him.

And now accident has thrown Edgar Marcellio in the track of the Neapolitan refugee's daughter. But could that indeed be Corinna? Yes: there was no doubt of it! That beautiful face—that symmetrical figure—that elastic walk—that gait which was replete with girlish elegance scarcely as yet blending with womanly dignity,—Oh, yes! all this was unmistakable—it was his own Corinna! But had she not seen him? or was she purposely endeavouring to avoid him? Perhaps at a glance she had caught sight of his impoverished appearance; and walking as she was with that young lady, she felt ashamed to be accosted by any one apparelled in a mean or shabby style? He was about to turn hastily round and rush away in another direction, when he thought that at least he would endeavour to ascertain where Corinna was living,—inasmuch as he might then take any step which farther deliberation should suggest. He accordingly followed at a distance,—keeping the ladies in view, but taking care to be unperceived by them if either should happen to look round. In this manner he tracked them until they turned in at the gate of Sidney Villa: he longed to follow to seek an interview with Corinna, to congratulate her on the prosperity which her own appearance indicated: but his cheeks glowed with shame as he thought that the aspect of his own toilet would tell so very different a tale! Nevertheless he could not tear himself away from the spot: he lingered near the gate. He now beheld a little child come bounding forward with arms outstretched towards Corinna and the lady with whom she was walking; and he recognised Corinna's little sister. It was therefore now tolerably evident that Corinna was

residing there, and that she was not merely paying a passing visit or making a call on the occasion. Still Edgar did not like to throw away this chance of obtaining an interview with the refugee's daughter; and the feelings which were now prompting him towards this end, were rapidly growing stronger than the sense of shame which had hitherto held him back.

"Why should I not present myself?" he asked. "Can she really have ceased to love me? Did she purposely avoid me ere now?"

Corinna and Agnes were entering the villa, while the little girl disappeared along an avenue of evergreens, where she rejoined the kind and watchful Rachel. Edgar entered the garden, and bent his way towards the door of the picturesque habitation,—unseen by any one belonging to the premises.

Corinna at once ascended to her chamber to put off her bonnet and scarf: Agnes was likewise about to repair to her own room for a similar purpose, when the housemaid accosting her, said, "If you please, Miss, the general postman brought this letter while you were out, apologizing that through some mistake it was not delivered this morning."

Agnes took the letter, which was addressed to herself; and she saw that it was the handwriting of a foreigner, while one of the postmarks indicated the city of Florence. Miss Evelyn therefore felt tolerably certain that this letter emanated from Signor Paoli; and she feared lest there must be something wrong on account of the circumstance of the refugee thus writing in the first instance to herself instead of to his daughter. She hastened to her chamber, where she opened the epistle: but she had not perused many lines before the colour vanished from her cheeks—an expression of horror appeared upon her countenance—and she murmured to herself, "Oh, what a task has the unhappy father deputed unto me!—how can I break the intelligence to poor Corinna? Murdered!—just heaven, murdered!"

Agnes was so much affected by the contents of the letter which she had just opened, that she felt a faintness coming over her—she was compelled to sit down to recover herself—and then she deliberated upon the best means of breaking to Corinna the fearful intelligence which she had to impart. Indeed it was not merely an unpleasant task: it was positively a frightful one:—and the young lady could not settle her thoughts to the precise form of words in which she should commence her revelation to Corinna. Thus for upwards of a quarter of an hour, or perhaps nearly twenty minutes, did Agnes remain in her own chamber after she had opened that letter;—and we must see what in the meanwhile is taking place below.

Corinna, having thrown off her bonnet and scarf, descended to the parlour on the ground floor; and she was about to take up her needlework, when she heard a rustling of the window-curtains. One of the casements reaching down to the ground, had been left open to give admittance to the fresh warm atmosphere; for we have already said that although it was now the middle of October, yet that the weather was as delicious as on the finest days of Spring. Corinna, on hearing that rustling sound, fancied that it was her little

sister returning from her gambollings in the garden; and she hastened forward to bestow a caress upon the loved child to whom she almost considered that she stood in the light of a mother. But Ah! on approaching the casement, whom should she behold before her but Edgar Marcellin?

Amazement seized upon the young girl: but joy was so unmistakably blended with this look of astonishment, that the Frenchman mentally ejaculated, while rapture thrilled through his heart, "She loves me!—she still loves me! Beautiful Corinna! she still loves me!"

"Oh! is it you, Monsieur!" exclaimed the Neapolitan dame, her cheeks now glowing with blushes, but joy still dancing in her large dark eyes.

"Yes, dearest Corinna—it is I!" he responded—"your own Edgar, who has never ceased to think of you! No, never, my well-beloved!—and blessed be the day which thus brings us together again!"

Her hand was already clasped in his own; and he now pressed it to his lips. She did not immediately disengage it, although it was the first time that those lips had ever touched her flesh; and while the blushes still burnt upon her cheeks, the light of innocent joy was still dancing in her superb black eyes.

"And I too have thought of you, Edgar," she tremulously murmured. "Where have you been? Why—why did you not endeavour to see me again?"

"Oh, Corinna!" he ejaculated, "rather let me ask why you quitted that neighbourhood so suddenly, and why you never wrote to me?"

"Edgar," she rejoined, with downcast and eadened look, "it was poverty which compelled us to leave that neighbourhood!—and if I did not write to you it was because I feared to be deemed guilty of an indiscretion—to be looked upon as too bold—in a word, to be thought unmaidenly in my conduct——"

"Oh, Corinna!" exclaimed Marcellin, "did you not know that I loved you? Ah! I certainly had not gone to the extent of making a positive and formal avowal; because I felt that our positions were for the time being, false, peculiar, and delicate! But, Oh! if my language took not the form of love, at least it was redolent thereof!—if it embodied itself not into love's shape, it must at least have wafted the whisperings of love's spirit! Oh, yes, Corinna! you knew that I loved you!"

"I thought it—I hoped it," responded the young girl, in a timid and tremulous tone, and still with looks that were bashfully cast downward.

"Oh! and you loved me in return?" ejaculated Edgar Marcellin, his countenance lighting up with a joy the radiance of which rendered its masculine beauty perfectly godlike in appearance. "Tell me, Corinna—tell me, my beloved—do you entertain towards me a similar feeling now? Oh, yes, I read it in those eyes!—yes, 'tis the language of love which they speak! Oh, dearest Corinna! you know not the amount of happiness which you are infusing into my heart!"

He now strained the Neapolitan girl to his breast, and imprinted kisses upon her cheeks: but

still mingled with all his fervour, there seemed to be that sense of respect towards herself which invariably accompanies the true and honourable love which a young man entertains towards a youthful maiden.

Gently disengaging herself from Marcellin's embrace, after having for a few moments received his caresses, Corinna said, "Ah! you must not think, Edgar, that it was without pain I received the sudden mandate from my father's lips to prepare for immediate removal, on that night when we left the neighbourhood of Leicester Square! And since then, Edgar, we have gone through so much trouble, and suffered so very much!—we have experienced fearful vicissitudes!—Oh! heaven! I cannot bear to look back and think of it all!"

"Poor Corinna!" murmured Marcellin. "But do you now live here?"

"Yes—with an angel in human shape, whom heaven sent to redeem us from the depth of misery!—a young lady named Miss Evelyn," added Corinna, her looks full of gratitude towards the image of her benefactress.

"Ah! it was doubtless this young lady with whom I just now beheld you walking?" said Marcellin.

"Yes—we have only very recently returned from the Regent's Park," replied Corinna.

"From whence I followed you," added Marcellin. "Ah! then, dearest Corinna, you did not see me—you did not recognise me——"

"See you and recognise you in the Park, Edgar? Oh, no!" exclaimed Corinna; "for if I had seen you, I should have assuredly testified my joy. I am no hypocrite and no deceiver; and I should have at once told Miss Evelyn the exact truth. But wherefore did you not accost me?—why adopt these stealthy means to obtain an interview with me?" inquired Corinna, now recollecting that Edgar had introduced himself to her presence by means of the open casement, and that he had not entered the villa through the more proper medium of the front door.

"Ah, look at me, Corinna!" he said, in a mournful voice: "behold how altered in my appearance I am!"

"You have discarded your moustache and your beard," responded the young girl; "but nevertheless I knew you in a moment! And what has this to do with——"

"Look at me again, Corinna!" interjected Marcellin: "look at my toilet—my apparel!" he added bitterly.

Until this moment the refugee's daughter had no eyes for anything that was disagreeable: she had been content to gaze only on Edgar's handsome countenance, and to observe the joy which was shining in his own eyes. But now that her attention was so especially directed to his apparel, she flung a glance over his entire person; and she felt shocked at the contrast which his appearance presented with that which it afforded when first she knew him.

"You too, then, have suffered, my poor Edgar!" she said, now of her own accord offering her hand and pressing his own with a sympathising fondness.

"Yes—I have suffered, Corinna," he replied; "and most unjustly have I been made to suffer!

I have sent memorials and petitions to the French Government: but the tyrant who under the name of President sways the destinies of France, has doubtless commanded the underlings who call themselves his Ministers to treat all my explanations and representations with a cold contemptuous silence. All my pecuniary affairs have fallen into confusion; and not only am I rendered an exile, but likewise a bankrupt. Ah, mine indeed is a sad fate, dear Corinna!"

"Yes—the fate of all political exiles is doubtless most sad," replied the young girl; "for heaven knows that my father and his family have had bitter experiences of the truth of what I have just said! But tell me of yourself, Edgar? What are you now doing?"

"I am teaching languages for my bread, Corinna," replied the young Frenchman. "Yes—I who was wont to mingle in the very best society—who found myself courted in all the most brilliant circles—who had only to make my appearance in any capital in Europe, in order to find next day the cards of the highest aristocracy upon my table,—I, the courted and the adored, am now reduced to the position of a miserable preceptor teaching French for a few shillings a lesson in a foreign country! But this is not all: there is still a greater humiliation to which I have been compelled to submit. The few pupils whom I possess, are scions of the British aristocracy: but the British aristocracy are so grossly saturated with prejudices, that they conceive a beard and moustache must necessarily be indicative of a Red Republican and Socialist; and still in that same besotted spirit, they look upon all Red Republicans and Socialists as so many monsters whom it would be a blessing to exterminate by means of magic or gunpowder. Well then, to be brief, Corinna, in order that I may be enabled to earn my bread as a preceptor of languages, I have been compelled to render my upper lip and my chin as smooth as you now behold them. These things I should account as the veriest trifles—utterly unworthy of mention,—were it not part and parcel of the humiliations which I have endured!"

"You must live in hope, Edgar," replied Corinna, "that a brighter day will dawn upon you."

"I must believe that the dawning of such a day has already commenced, my beloved," responded Marcellin, "inasmuch as I am again blessed by beholding your countenance and listening to the sounds of your voice! And Oh, Corinna! if ever a brighter day should indeed dawn for me—if restored to my own country I should recover my fortune, and again enjoy the position from which I have been so cruelly hurled down,—Oh, believe me that I should only be too happy to throw myself at your feet, to offer you my hand as you already possess my heart, and to beseech that you will accompany me to the altar!"

These were delicious words for the ears of the young girl to drink in; for the language of love is as sweet to the soul as the choicest nectar is to the tongue;—and while Corinna's cheeks were suffused with modest blushes, the light of joy was swimming in her eyes, and her gentle bosom was heaving and sinking with the palpitations of her heart.

"Where is now your father?" inquired Marcellin, after a brief pause.

"He is not in England," answered Corinna; "he has gone to Italy."

"To Italy?" ejaculated Edgar. "But he is not insensate enough to plunge headlong again into political intrigues, at a period when reaction is everywhere taking place—when things are universally tending towards despotism on the Continent—and therefore when the failure of insurrectionary attempts is inevitable?"

"No—my father does not entertain any ideas of fresh plot and intrigue," responded Corinna; "neither has he gone to Naples. His object in visiting another of the Italian States, is to seek after his son—my elder brother—of whom I think that I must have spoken to you—"

"Yes—I believe so, Corinna," interjected Marcellin. "But whatsoever your father's motive for revisiting Italy may be, I hope that he will accomplish his aim safely and successfully. And in the meanwhile, Corinna, during your father's absence you are residing with this young English lady who has become so great a friend and benefactress?"

"Yes—Miss Evelyn, who is as amiable as she is beautiful," replied Corinna. "Ah! now I bethink me, she will be coming hither directly—indeed I wonder that she has not already descended from her own chamber! I will introduce you to her—I will tell her everything that has taken place between us—for I must keep back no secrets from her knowledge—Oh, no! not for worlds would I!"

"Would it not be better, my dear Corinna," asked Edgar Marcellin, "if I were to retire for a few minutes, while you explained yourself to Miss Evelyn? Indeed, the propriety of such a course is apparent enough. You must first ascertain whether it be agreeable for her to receive me:—you can tell her that I am a gentleman by birth, Corinna—but that in circumstances I am reduced—You may tell her likewise that I am not so reckless of your happiness as to hint at the probability of our being united for the present, until circumstances shall place me in a more favourable position."

"Rest assured, Edgar," responded Corinna, with a bewitchingly sweet smile, "I shall speak of you to Miss Evelyn as you deserve—and that is not in a way which will tend to your disparagement. And now go and walk in the garden while I seek the amiable Agnes—"

"But one word, Corinna!" interrupted Edgar. "Have you ever told your father of the meetings that used to take place?—did you ever suffer him to learn that I had introduced myself to his daughter, and that by my looks I had given her to understand that I loved her?"

"No—I never mentioned all this to my father," replied Corinna, with a blush rising upon her cheeks; "and I feel that I ought to have done so!"

"But what explanation will you give to Miss Evelyn," inquired Edgar Marcellin, "if she question you on this point? Ah, by the bye, at once let me ask when do you expect your father's return home?"

"I have not the slightest idea," responded Corinna. "He has been gone nearly a month—and I

have only received one letter from him, which was but a hasty line written from Leghorn to say that he had reached the Italian shore in safety, and that he was about to continue his journey without delay. Now as three days have elapsed since I received that communication, I may daily and hourly be looking for another letter—because Florence is at no great distance from Leghorn—”

“Ah! then your father has gone to Florence?” said Marcellin.

“Yes,” replied Corinna: “for alas! it is now eight months since we received any tidings of my beloved brother—”

“Poor Corinna!” said Marcellin compassionately: “you have now this new cause for apprehension and distress!”

“Alas, yes!” rejoined Corinna: “but heaven grant that nothing calamitous may have occurred to my dear brother Giulio!”

“Giulio!” ejaculated Edgar, with a sudden start: and then he muttered to himself, “But no! it cannot be! A mere coincidence!”

“Yes,” continued Corinna, “my brother’s name is Giulio. Why did you seem to look as if you were listening to something strange? Ah, Edgar, I ought now to reveal to your ears a certain piece of information which through a sense of false shame I suppressed when first I knew you. It was that poor Giulio found himself compelled to leave the University of Padua—he then went to Florence—Alas! he was compelled to accept a menial position—”

“A menial position!” ejaculated Edgar: and then as he glanced half in affright at the young girl, he was suddenly smitten with the conviction of something which had never struck him before—namely, that there was a likeness betwixt the page Giulio whom he had known in Florence and the maiden who stood before him.

“Is it possible that you ever met my brother?” asked Corinna hastily. “Have you been to Florence, Edgar? Were you at Florence before your misfortunes in France?”

“Florence?”—and it was with a half vacant, half bewildered air that Marcellin thus repeated the name of the Tuscan capital. “Oh, yes! I have been to Florence.”

“Did you happen to know or to hear of the Marchioness di Mirano?” inquired Corinna. “But Ah! you again start!—you look frightened!—Oh, I understand! Yes! yes! footsteps are approaching! Miss Evelyn is coming! Hasten you into the garden, until I summon you back!”

With these words the young maiden playfully pushed her lover across the threshold of the casement; and as she turned away from thence, Agnes entered the room. She held a letter in her hand; and Corinna was at once struck by the sad seriousness of her countenance. Instead therefore of at once entering upon the ingenuous revelation of her love for Edgar Marcellin, the young maiden anxiously inquired, “Good heaven, my dear friend! is anything the matter?”

“My poor Corinna,” responded Agnes, “it grieves me infinitely to become the medium of unpleasant intelligence—”

“Unpleasant intelligence?” echoed Corinna, glancing at the letter which Agnes held in her hand: “what can you mean? Is that from my

dear father? Oh, has any mischief occurred to him?”

“No, Corinna,” hastily rejoined Miss Evelyn: “no personal injury has been sustained by your parent! Of that you may rest assured!”

“Then my poor brother—my beloved brother Giulio,” ejaculated Corinna, with feverish haste, anxiety, and suspense—“has any mischief befallen him?”

At this moment there was a rustling behind the draperies of the open casement: but it escaped the notice of both the young ladies.

“It is of your brother Giulio,” continued Agnes, “that I am compelled to speak—”

“Compelled to speak?” ejaculated Corinna, who while thus catching at the words, fancied she had caught their meaning likewise. “Then he has been doing something wrong? Oh, unhappy Giulio!”

“No, Corinna,” interrupted Agnes, speaking very seriously, “you must not thus accuse your poor brother, who did nothing wrong—at least I firmly believe not—”

“Oh, thanks, thanks for this assurance!” ejaculated the maiden. “Then Giulio has met with some calamity—some misfortune arising from no fault of his own—”

“My dear girl,” interrupted Agnes, laying her hand upon Corinna’s shoulder and gazing tenderly and fixedly upon her countenance, “your brother Giulio is beyond the sphere of this world’s temptation, as well as beyond the reach of the earth’s calamity!”

“Ah, dead! dead!” moaned Corinna, sinking upon a chair and giving way to her grief.

For some minutes she wept, and then wiping her eyes, she rose from her seat, saying, “Perhaps, dear Miss Evelyn, it is all for the best—and heaven, taking pity upon his youth, his blighted prospects, and perhaps his vain struggling to carve out for himself a career in the world, has received him to another sphere! That letter is doubtless from my father? Does he give any particulars?”

“Yes—take the letter, my poor Corinna,” responded Agnes, “and read it. But prepare yourself—”

She stopped short; and instead of suffering Corinna to take the letter, she held it back.

“My dear friend,” she continued, her voice trembling with emotion, “I ought to prepare you somewhat more fully for the terrible revelations which you will encounter in this epistle. Summon to your aid, dear Corinna, all Christian fortitude and resignation: for alas! a terrible crime was committed in Florence—it occurred upwards of eight months ago—nerve yourself, Corinna! nerve yourself, my sweet friend, I conjure you!—It was the crime of murder which was committed—murder—”

“Murder!” repeated the damsel, a cold shudder visibly thrilling through her entire form, while she clasped her hands and her countenance expressed a mingling horror and dismay.

“Alas, it is so!” responded Agnes: “a murder most foul—most horrible! And it was thus that your poor brother Giulio met his death!”

“Alas, my poor brother! to think that you should perish thus!” moaned Corinna. “Oh, what a frightful discovery for my poor father to make! Just heavens! I feel as if my brain were



turning. But no! I will be calm—I will summon to my aid that Christian fortitude and resignation whereof you have spoken! That letter doubtless contains particulars——”

“The letter is brief,” responded Agnes. “Your poor father, terribly excited, could pen but some dozen lines,—he gives no details,—he only records the salient facts, which are sad and terrible enough! Here, my poor Corinna—there is now no reason why I should any longer withhold the letter from you! Take it—read its contents—and again I say, nerve yourself!”

“I am nerved and resigned!” answered Corinna, sadly and meekly. “Reared in the Catholic faith, I was taught by a beloved mother to submit with all humility to the dispensations of Providence. It is thus that I now submit! But tell me, my dear friend, has my father discovered who was the perpetrator of the horrible

crime which has deprived him of an affectionate son and me of a loving brother?”

“Your father simply writes the name of the assassin,” rejoined Agnes. “He gives no reason for the crime—he enters into no details—he says that he is half distracted at the time he writes—but by the next post he will send fuller particulars. Here—take the letter, Corinna.”

“And the name which my father mentions therein?” said the young girl: “what is the name of my brother’s murderer?”

And Agnes gave the answer, and she spoke the name,—saying, “The murderer of your brother, my poor Corinna, was a wretch called Edgar Mercellin!”

“’Tis false! ’tis false as hell!” vociferated the young Frenchman, as he rushed into the room: but at the same moment that those words rang forth from his lips, a pealing shriek vibrated from

the tongue of Corinna Paoli—and she sank senseless upon the floor.

CHAPTER LXXV.

JOSEPHINE AND CICELY.

WE are now about to transfer the attention of the reader to the villa inhabited by the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Hardress at Baywater. It was about the same date as that of which we have just been writing—namely, the middle of October—and it was between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, that we shall find Cicely in her elegantly furnished bed-room. The chamber was appointed with the most exquisite taste; the atmosphere was warm and perfumed. Numerous bottles of the rarest scents and choicest perfumes might be seen upon the toilet-table,—near which there stood a full-length mirror, or *psyche*, in which the fair mistress of the place might survey her entire form at pleasure.

Cicely was not now alone there; another young lady was present; and in order to avoid any unnecessary mystery, we may as well at once observe that this young lady was the Hon. Josephine Hardress. In a former chapter we have described her as being of fair complexion, with glossy auburn hair, and large blue eyes full of a soft pensiveness. She was tall and well formed: her age was close upon two-and-twenty; for about ten months had now elapsed since we found her taking refuge at Mowbray Villa, in the neighbourhood of Hastings, in order to conceal the shame of one who was about to become a mother without being a wife.

But let us continue our narrative. Josephine Hardress was now disapparring herself in her sister-in-law's chamber at the house at Baywater; and Cicely was taking from a box certain articles of raiment which she was spreading out upon the bed. But these articles of raiment all belonged to a masculine costume! What could either of these ladies have to do with the apparel of a gentleman? We shall soon see, Josephine Hardress presently finished the process of laying aside the costume which properly became her sex; and then, with Cicely's assistance, she began to clothe herself in the masculine vesture which had been produced from the box. There was some little mirth and raillery on the part of the two young ladies as the process went on; but there was a certain sternness and resoluteness of purpose in the looks of both, as if it were no masquerading pleasantry which was in contemplation, but as if the assumption of that male costume by the Hon. Josephine Hardress were connected with some purpose of real sterling importance.

Josephine, being tall for a woman, appeared when dressed in male costume to be a young gentleman somewhat under the medium stature. That costume fitted her most admirably; and by degrees, as she put on garment after garment, by the succour of her sister-in-law Cicely, she evidently strove to adopt a more dashing, fearless, and off-hand demeanour than that which was naturally her own.

"And now let us gather up this beautiful hair

of yours, Josephine," said Cicely; "and then you shall put on this hat, and it will complete your attire. There!—now you are indeed perfect! Ah! and how interesting!" ejaculated Cicely, with looks of admiration.

"And yet I feel to a certain extent awkward and embarrassed," said Josephine, "notwithstanding all my endeavours to adopt as manly a demeanour as possible."

"Oh, but you must succeed in throwing off that embarrassment!" cried Cicely. "Recollect, you have undertaken to play a particular part—and you must perform it! Nothing but a bold, courageous, and indeed desperate demeanour will strike terror into the heart of the cowardly fellow!"

"Ah! now that your words so vividly remind me of all my wrongs," exclaimed Josephine, the colour mantling with the crimson glew of indignation upon her cheeks, "I feel that I am capable of any proof of courage and daring that may be required of me! Here! give me a pistol, my dear Cicely!"

The Hon. Mrs. Hardress lost not a moment in complying with the desire of her sister-in-law, to whom she handed a small rifle-pistol of most exquisite workmanship,—she herself retaining its companion.

"Take care, Josephine," she said; "the pistols are always kept loaded."

"Ah! why so?" exclaimed the young lady in male attire, as a pallor flitted across her countenance; and for a moment she seemed as if she had rather have nothing to do with the weapon.

"Oh, because Hector keeps them loaded for security's sake," replied Mrs. Hardress. "There have lately been some very daring burglaries in this neighbourhood—But surely, Josephine—"

"No, no—I am not afraid!" ejaculated the young lady. "It was only a passing reluctance to hold the weapon—but I am already accustomed to it—and I can even play with it—"

"At all events, my dear Josephine," said Cicely, quietly, "keep the muzzle turned in the other direction; for you have just been pointing it most disagreeably towards myself."

"Good heavens! if it had gone off!" cried Josephine, now again becoming very pale.

"Then I should have been stretched dead at your feet," was Cicely's reply, still given in a tone of calm quiet courage. "But do not be agitated and nervous—assert all the powers of your mind—be resolved—be determined—say to yourself that you *will* be bold and at the same time collected—and you know not how easy it will become to accomplish that which you are bent on doing!"

"Ah! if I were only like you, Cicely!" exclaimed Josephine, gazing upon her sister-in-law with a look of envy mingled with admiration and friendship. "But yet I feel that I am gathering courage, fortitude, and self-possession from your example. Now see! do I not at present hold the pistol in a becoming manner? In a few minutes I shall be quite expert; and you will fancy that I have been taking lessons in a shooting-gallery. Yes, truly—I feel every minute more and more at home in this costume! I really think, Cicely, it has its advantages over that which belongs to our own sex."

"Ah! at that moment," ejaculated Cicely, with a peal of merry laughter, "you were indeed admirable! You had precisely the graceful, negligent, lounging air of a young fashionable!"

"And what do you think of this?" asked Josephine, laying down her pistol, folding her arms across her bosom, and leaning them upon the back of a chair, while she looked up with arch seriousness into Cicely's countenance. "Is this indicative of self-possession?"

"The attitude is inimitable," exclaimed Mrs. Hardress, still laughing merrily with delight. "Really, my dear Josephine, if it were not for the contours of the bust are somewhat too richly developed, you might pass yourself off as a very pretty young gentleman—a trifle effeminate of course, and with a face so remarkably smooth that it would appear as if the growth of a beard were impossible. Ah! I should like to see the attitude you would take, if imitating some *exquisite* when smoking a cigar."

"If we had a cigar here," responded Josephine, "I would very soon gratify you on the point. I feel that I am becoming quite manly; and as for courage, rest assured, my dear Cicely, all your kind advice and aid shall not have been thrown away—but the purpose which we have in view," she added, her countenance becoming serious and almost severe, "shall be accomplished!"

"I am delighted to hear you speak in a tone so confident," observed Cicely. "Indeed, my dear Josephine, when the moment for action comes, you must say to yourself—"

"I will say to myself that I am about to deal with a villain!" she exclaimed, energetically, at the same time stamping on the carpet with her foot which was imprisoned in an exquisite patent leather boot; "and rest assured, Cicely, that I can deal most remorselessly with him. But tell me, why are you yourself so bitter—"

"Bitter, my dear Josephine?" interjected Cicely: "that is not the word, because I personally know so little of the Hon. Theodore Clifford—indeed, I never saw him until he called after having been referred by you to me—"

"Yet if you be not bitter against him," said Josephine, "you at least have a very strong feeling—"

"Am I not taking your part?" exclaimed Cicely; "and to take your part naturally inspires me with all the enthusiastic feelings of a partisan. Besides, this Theodore Clifford is indeed a most accomplished villain—"

"Yes—a villain such as there exist but few in this world!" interjected Josephine with passionate vehemence. "To suffer me to learn that after all he had never seriously thought of marrying me!"

"And at the very time when you were suffering so deeply on his account," ejaculated Cicely, "he was elsewhere performing the part of a vile seducer!—he was then beguiling Floribel Lieter, even perhaps more cruelly than he beguiled you, Josephine, because he drugged her! She confessed all the truth to her cousin Agnes Evelyn; and Agnes one day revealed the particulars to me."

"Yes, Theodore Clifford is a villain in every sense!" exclaimed Josephine; "and the conduct which he is now pursuing stamps him almost with the blackness of a fiend! The wretch! to endeavour to replenish his empty purse by means so

vile! Ah, I wish that I were indeed a man; for then with this arm of mine would I bestow upon him such chastisement as only a masculine hand can inflict!"

"Bravo, Josephine!" exclaimed Cicely: "say everything to sustain your courage! think of everything to inspire you with additional fortitude! lash yourself up into a rage!"

"By heavens, Cicely! it requires but little to do that!" answered Josephine Hardress, her cheeks now burning with indignation, and her usually soft eyes shining with a fire brighter and more fierce than had ever beamed in those orbs before. "You know, Cicely, that naturally I am meek and mild—perhaps I have been called amiable—but Ah! I can assure you that there have been moments when it has appeared as if a veritable fiend were existing within me! And this is one of those moments!"

"Well, my dear Josephine, you will soon have an opportunity of punishing that villain. It is now close upon five o'clock—and at about that hour he is to be here. We do not dine until six; and thus by the time dinner is served up, we shall have accomplished all the task that we have set ourselves, and we shall have had leisure to compose our feelings and suffer our excitement to cool down."

"And what if Hector were to return unexpectedly?" exclaimed Josephine: "what would he think,—he who is altogether ignorant of his sister's sad secret! he who loves me so well, and has never for a moment suspected that my honour had ever been tarnished!"

"Do not be afraid, Josephine," responded Cicely. "Hector has accepted an engagement to dine at his club—and I know that he will not fail to keep it. It was for that reason I selected this particular evening for the business which we have in hand."

"Ah, my dear Cicely," said Josephine, "how deep a debt of gratitude do I owe you! But ever since you began by treating me so cruelly and unkindly, you have behaved towards me with so much goodness and generosity! And yet you never rightly explained why you played me so strange a trick,—why under the name of Mrs. Hanbury you fired at all enticed me down to Mowbray Villa near Hastings—and why after four or five days of most affectionate demeanour towards me, you sped up to London and told my parents everything!"

"But you will also admit, my dear Josephine," responded Cicely, "that when after that visit to London I returned to Mowbray Villa near Hastings, and frankly confessed to you that I was not Mrs. Hanbury, but that I was Mrs. Hardress, your brother's wife,—you will admit, Josephine, I say, that when once I had avowed all this and that you had recovered from the shock, my behaviour towards you—"

"Was that of a veritable sister!" exclaimed Josephine, in accents of enthusiasm. "Oh, yes, dearest Cicely! never, never can I forget how during the fearful hours of trial and trouble, you ministered unto me—you were day and night at my bedside—you seemed to sustain me when I felt as if I were actually drooping and sinking out of existence! And then, too, with what caution and carefulness did you manage everything, dear Cicely—even to the disposal of the poor babe

which perished within the first hour of its birth!"

"Ah! then, you see, Josephine," interrupted Cicely, "that if I appeared at one moment to perform the most monstrous and wanton act of cruelty towards you, by inveigling you as it were into my power at Mowbray Villa, and then hastening up to London to communicate to your parents the secret of your dishonour,—if, I say, I acted with this unaccountable treachery and brutality towards you, yet on the other hand I treated you with all the kindness which a sister might show unto a sister!"

"True!" ejaculated Josephine; "and the sense of the good you did me, was therefore stronger than that of the evil which you wrought me. Yes, Cicely—it was because your attentions were so unremitting and so sincere—and because to those attentions I owed my very life—that I resolved to banish the recollection of the injury you had done me! And therefore ever since, Cicely, we have been as friends and as sisters:—you have been my confidant—and now you are assisting me to frustrate and punish the designs of a villain!"

"And would you have me tell you," asked Cicely, "why it was that I treated you in a manner that must have indeed been so unaccountably treacherous and cruel to all appearance? We have not for a long time touched upon the topic—methought it was dropped for ever: but since it now happens to be revived, I have no objection to clear up the mystery. Yet tell me, Josephine—did the motive never strike you—did you never form the slightest conjecture, the faintest suspicion?"

"Yes, Cicely," answered the young lady, "there were vague ideas flitting through my mind at the time, that you had used the knowledge of my sad secret to disarm the resentment of my parents on account of your marriage with Hector—aye, and even to make them recognise you—visit you—receive you at their own dwelling!"

"And why did you hesitate, my dear Josephine," asked Cicely, "to come to the conclusion that these conjectures on your part were all accurate and correct?"

"Shall I tell you, Cicely?" asked the young lady, fixing her eyes earnestly upon her sister-in-law. "It was because I fancied that you were of too independent a disposition—too haughty and imperious—by nature too proud and dignified—too deeply imbued with a sense of respect for yourself, to stoop to such means!"

"And now I must tell you, after all, Josephine, that you were entirely wrong," interrupted Cicely; "for I will even confess that I am capable of any policy, no matter how mean and treacherous—no matter how bold and desperate—in order to carry out whatsoever aims I may have in view! Yes, Josephine—your conjectures were right!—but believe me, my dear girl, it was not without a pang of remorse that I made use of your sad secret as a means of compelling your father and mother to acknowledge me as their daughter-in-law. It was agreed between us that the whole matter should be wrapped up in as much mystery as possible—so that you were not to be formally and circumstantially told how I had been swayed by such selfish motives when betraying your secret; while

it was also agreed that this secret of yours should be religiously maintained from the knowledge of your brother Hector."

"And Hector never has suspected it?" said Josephine inquiringly.

"Never!" responded Cicely. "Of this I can assure you!—for even if as a wife I might not be admitted fully into his confidence, yet believe me that as a woman of the world I could speedily fathom the innermost thoughts of his soul!"

"This seems to be an afternoon of explanations," observed Josephine, "as well as of strange and important proceedings!"—and she glanced over her male attire as she thus spoke. "Answer me one more question, my dear Cicely——"

"Are you sure that by enlightening you on so many points concerning which you were hitherto kept plunged in mystery and ignorance, I am not at the same time revealing such dark portions of my own nature as will turn into aversion the love which you may at present feel for me as your sister-in-law?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Josephine, with some degree of bitterness; "you must not think that I am now so nice, so fastidious, and so particular as I used to be! In the first place it may be very well supposed that a young lady who has been seduced and has in secret become the mother of a child, must have had her experiences more or less enlarged in respect to the world and its ways. And such is the case with me. Besides, what am I doing at this present instant? Am I not forgetting all the decencies of my sex by assuming this male garb?"

"Enough, my dear Josephine!—enough!" interrupted Cicely; "or you will disgust yourself with the proceeding you have entered upon, and of which you were ere now inclined even to be proud!"

"And so I still am!" replied Josephine. "Look, my dear Cicely! Does my hand now tremble as I take up this pistol?—do I look like a novice in the handling of it?—and do you feel as if there were any awkwardness on my part which might place you in bodily fear as just now you were? Pshaw!—I have already the spirit of a man!—and if the villain, when he comes, do not accede to the demand which is to be made upon him, I swear to you, Cicely, that without pity and without remorse——"

"Hush, my dear friend!" interrupted Mrs. Hardress; "we do not want murder's work to be done beneath this roof! Display as bold a front and as strong a heroism as you are now showing—and it will be sufficient! He will be overawed—he will crouch at your feet—and the game will be all in your own hands!"

"And so I mean it to be!" ejaculated Josephine, whose manner for the last few minutes had been displaying a vivacious hardihood and a wild recklessness which were something more than the mere *barum-scarum* exuberations of a young girl, but which rather resembled the devil-may-care boldness of a young man. "Yes, yes, Cicely!" she continued; "if success depend upon me, it shall be realized! But ought he not to be here by this time?"

"It is only just five," responded Mrs. Hardress; "and I told him to be here about that hour. Are you afraid, Josephine, that if his presence be de-

layed, a reaction will take place in your feelings—your courage will evaporate—”

“Cicely, this jesting on your part is too bad!” cried Josephine, laughing; then turning towards the *psyche*, she surveyed herself with considerable satisfaction, while tutoring the countenance, which was naturally so soft and interesting in its beauty, to put on the severest and eternal expression. “No! no! my courage will not ooze out! Ah, this is fortunate! Here is Hector’s cigar-case lying on this side table! And is there not something very manly, my dear Cicely, in smoking a cigar?”

Cicely could not help laughing at the *maîtrise* and ingenueness which were thus blending with the study and desire on the part of her friend to maintain as fierce and dauntless a demeanour as possible; and she said, “By all means take a cigar, Josephine—if you do not think the tobacco smoke will make you sick—”

“It will be useless for me to study to become as manly as possible for the nonce,” said Josephine, “if you by your raillery and banter keep constantly reminding me of the weaknesses of my real sex. But look, Cicely!”

Thus speaking, Josephine took a cigar from the case—lighted it, and placed it between her beautiful red lips. A wreath of fleecy vapour curled upward from those lips; and Cicely, who had a vein of mischief in her mirthfulness, exclaimed laughing, “I really thought to see you suck in the smoke instead of puffing it outwards: and if such had been the case—”

“I should now be sick and ill,” added Josephine; “and the villain Theodore Clifford might perhaps have yet had the laugh against me. You do not know, Cicely, with what a spirit I am imbued at the present moment! But, Ah! I recollect, I was going to ask you a certain question just now, when the discourse flowed into other channels.”

“Yes—I recollect also,” said Cicely. “We were speaking of those incidents which occurred some ten months back, and which first rendered us acquainted.”

“I was about to ask you, my dear Cicely,” resumed Josephine, “how it was that you first became acquainted with my secret, so that you were enabled to devise the scheme of enticing me to Mowbray Villa? Was it direct from the lips of my maid Selina that you heard the tale? or—”

“Or what?” asked Cicely. “I see that you have another conjecture?”

“Yes,” rejoined Josephine: “I was about to say that perhaps Selina might have betrayed the secret in the first instance to Luke Corbet?”

“It was so,” interrupted Cicely; “and it was in reward for Selina’s treachery towards you, that she and Luke Corbet received from my hand a sufficient sum to enable them to marry and set up in business. I have now told you everything, my dear Josephine, with frankness; and I am not sorry that the occasion should have arisen to enable me to clear up those little mysteries which it was indeed useless to maintain. But in reference to the Corbets your secret is safe.”

At this moment Cicely’s confidential maid entered the bed-chamber, saying in a low voice and with a significant look, “He is here.”

Cicely made a sign to the abigail, which she

evidently at once understood; for she withdrew with the air of one who was ready to perform a duty of which she had been previously made aware. But at the same moment Josephine Hordress, taking a pistol in her hand, peered behind the curtains of the bed; while Cicely deposited the other pistol on a piece of furniture near the door. Cicely then issued from the chamber—but leaving that door more than three parts open behind her.

The adjoining room was Cicely’s *boudoir*, if we may borrow the French term for that which was really an exquisitely-furnished little parlour communicating with the bed-chamber. Tapers were burning upon the mantel—a lamp stood upon the table in the centre of the room; and Cicely flung a glance into the mirror to assure herself that her looks were sufficiently composed for the part which she had to perform, and that her toilet was of an elegance sufficient to give a species of coquettish support to the winning and seductive mien which she was now all in a moment adopting.

Scarcely were her eyes withdrawn from that mirror, with the full conviction in her mind that she had never in her life looked better, when the door was noiselessly opened, and Theodore Clifford was ushered into the room by the abigail, who immediately disappeared. He bowed with a kind of familiar courtesy; and then he riveted his eyes upon the lady who awaited him there. Smiles were upon her countenance, blended with a certain look which seemed to be that of a softly sensuous confusion; and as Clifford’s eyes slowly wandered over the richly-developed contours which the costume so completely delineated, it was soon with devouring regards that he gazed upon the fine person of Cicely.

“Be seated, Mr. Clifford,” she said, placing herself upon a sofa, with a sort of half-air as if she left him to choose a seat for himself, but yet with a sort of half-invitation for him to sit down by her side.

And this he did,—still bending upon her glances that were full of passion, and which seemed to be in voluptuous response to the semi-overtures that were made by herself.

“And now, Mr. Clifford,” she said, in a soft tone, and yet with a sufficient degree of seriousness to inspire the belief that business-matters were to be entered on first, whatsoever the next topic of discourse might be,—“let us begin by settling the subject which induced you to favour me with a visit the day before yesterday, and then again yesterday.”

“Ah, Mrs. Hordress,” he replied, with a look of languishing meaning, “I would almost rather that I might be permitted at once to explain the hopes with which I have been inspired—”

“Let that topic follow,” she said with a winning smile, as for a moment she laid her white hand upon his arm in that pretty way which a woman has of enforcing her will by a gesture and a touch. “Come, Mr. Clifford, let us in the first instance speak seriously and in a matter-of-fact strain. Look upon me therefore at the beginning only as—what shall I call myself?—the friend to whom Josephine has referred you for the purpose of arbitrating between you both in a matter of some little difficulty and delicacy. Ah! and I ought to add that I am fully prepared to settle this matter;

for as I on my own side have a pocket-book full of bank-notes here, you on your side will have the kindness to tell me whether you have brought all the correspondence to which allusions have been made at previous interviews?"

As she thus spoke, the Hon. Mrs. Hardress placed a pocket-book on the table; and Theodore Clifford at the same time produced a small packet of letters; but having shown them, he returned them into his pocket, saying, "I can assure you that every letter which I ever received from Josephine is here."

Cicely bit her lip for a moment at the almost insulting want of confidence which was displayed by this young man, who even at the very instant when he was presumptuously aspiring to the favours of the lady, nevertheless exhibited his own utter selfishness by the fact that he would not part from the letters, nor even risk the chance of their being snatched up, until the bargain for their redemption should be fully concluded.

"And now," said Cicely, instantaneously recovering the mingled seriousness and urbanity which she had just before assumed, "let us enter thoroughly into the subject which we must first discuss. I believe, Mr. Clifford, you informed me that your unfortunate misunderstandings with your father Lord Windermere have placed you in such a position as to compel you to do something which is very repugnant to your feelings——"

"Yes, most repugnant," he exclaimed. "My father refuses to see me—he has completely cut off my allowance—and the sorry trifle of a few hundreds a-year which I can call my own, is my sole present source of income. But, Oh, Mrs. Hardress! will you not hate and loathe me——"

"Assuredly not!" answered Cicely, with an air of surprise: "wherefore should I? It is a mere business-transaction;—and between you and me, I have no real love for Josephine, although she is very far from knowing how little favourable are my sentiments towards her—otherwise she would not have chosen me as the arbitrix in this matter. Therefore I beg you to proceed in all confidence; and nothing that now takes place between us can possibly prejudice you in my estimation."

"Ah, this assurance is most kind!" exclaimed Theodore. "Well then, Mrs. Hardress, you make allowances for my position?"

"You shall see that I do," responded Cicely. "But let us at once enter in a business-like way upon the negotiation which we have in hand. You possess these letters, written to you by Josephine, and which contain the secret of your loves as well as of her degradation and disgrace. These letters you have thought it expedient to restore into her possession; but as you yourself are poor, and you know that she has the command of money, you have thought that if the letters were worth having they were worth purchasing. Is it not so?"

"It is," replied Theodore; "and Josephine, much distressed as well as alarmed at the application—perhaps even indignant—referred me to you as one who being acquainted with her secret, could best arbitrate in the matter and settle it."

"This is exactly as I understand the matter," responded Cicely. "Well then, Mr. Clifford, it only remains for us to settle the amount which is to be paid on Josephine's behalf for the surrender of her letters. I believe you asked two thousand

guineas: Josephine hinted to me her opinion that a thousand would be an adequate sum: but arbitrating as I am between you, I think that I might fairly decree a division of the difference and suggest that fifteen hundred would be a fair amount for her to give and you to receive."

"And I at once consent," rejoined Clifford, chuckling at the idea of being thus enabled to replenish his almost empty purses.

"Good!" said Cicely: "that matter shall be presently arranged. But how am I to know that the packet which you are about to hand over to me, contains all the letters you may have at any time received from Josephine?—for though, as I have already said, I have little love for that young lady, and little sympathy in her misfortune, still it is my desire to act fairly towards her, so that she shall not hereafter discover any ground for accusing me of having negligently sacrificed or willfully betrayed her interests."

"I can only pledge my most solemn sacred word of honour," replied Theodore Clifford, "that I on my part am acting fairly, and that every letter received from Josephine is included in this packet. If there be any means by which I can give an additional proof of my good faith——"

"Yes—there is a means," interrupted Cicely. "There are writing materials. Take your place at that table, and pen me a letter to this effect,—that whatsoever calumny or scandal may have whispered in reference to yourself and the Honourable Josephine Hardress, is utterly false. Ah! you can write the letter as if it were in reply to one received from me, and in which I, as Josephine's sister-in-law, deemed it my duty on hearing of those whispered scandals to address you on the point and demand an explanation. Believe me, Mr. Clifford," added Cicely, in her most winning tones and with her most voluptuous looks, "that the more completely you thus vindicate and clear up Josephine's character, in case anything should hereafter be said in reference thereto, the higher will be the opinion I myself shall entertain of you; and—and"—here Cicely threw into her voice the tremulousness of a soft confusion—"the more readily shall I be inclined to listen to you——"

"Say not another word!" ejaculated Clifford, rejoiced at the prospect of obtaining not merely a considerable sum of money, but likewise the favours of the lady by whose side he sat. "You shall see what I will write; and I feel convinced you will be satisfied!"

He accordingly placed himself at the table, and he began to pen a letter in the strain which Cicely had already dictated. He had really withheld none of Josephine's letters—not because any sense of honourable feeling remained to him, even in the midst of the performance of a rascally deed—but simply because so refined a piece of villainy had never occurred to him as that of keeping back one or two of the letters to be similarly used for a future purpose of extortion. Thus as he was already prepared to surrender the whole correspondence, and thereby settle the matter at once and for ever, he had no hesitation in writing precisely such a letter as Cicely had suggested. On the contrary, he had an additional motive for so doing, on account of the hint which she had thrown out that such conduct would prove the surest pass-

port to her favour. The letter was accordingly penned: Cicely read it—she was completely satisfied—and she suffered it to remain upon the table, whence Theodore himself did not dare remove it.

"And now," she said, all at once assuming a most winning look, "tell me what you ventured to hope—repeat to me the language which you yesterday addressed to my ears—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Theodore, who for a moment was disappointed that the pecuniary matter was not first settled before this new topic was entered upon—though the next instant he thought that it would be indelicate and indiscreet to make the slightest allusion to that point,—"*was it possible for me to remain unmoved in your presence—*"

"Ah, Mr. Clifford!" said Cicely, with that species of hesitation which seemed to imply that he had only to prosecute his addressee boldly and forcibly in order to win her; "but how can I place confidence in you, even if in the weakness of my own heart I were to forget my duty towards my husband?"

"Did I ever betray Josephine's secret?" asked Theodore passionately. "No, no!—and if now that everything has long been at an end between her and me, I have availed myself of the power which circumstances gave me over her—"

"To that subject," Cicely interrupted him, "we will not again allude. It is your business, and not mine: and I repeat, it has not altered you in my estimation—On the contrary, the generous readiness with which you penned that letter ought after all to inspire me with the fullest confidence."

"Oh, let it be so, beautiful Cicely!" ejaculated Theodore, seizing her hand and pressing it to his lips.

"But, Oh! reflect, Mr. Clifford," she said, slowly and as if hesitatingly withdrawing that hand; "you would render me false and faithless to my husband; and if he were to discover—"

"Ah, dearest Cicely!" interrupted Clifford, "have you not already gone very, very far with me?—did not your looks yesterday bid me hope? Yes!—and even your words, when you bade me come to you under circumstances of such privacy this evening! Are you not already compromised with your maid in respect to the manner in which I have been introduced hither?—and must you not have every reason to rely upon her fidelity when you resolve to trust her thus far? Who, then, can betray the secret? Oh, render me happy, Cicely! I know—I feel that I cannot be altogether indifferent to you!"

Cicely appeared to be hesitating and yielding. Theodore again took her hand—again pressed it to his lips: and then she whispered in his ear, "You will be the cause of my undoing: but, Oh! it is impossible to resist you!"

From the spot where this colloquy took place, Clifford's eyes could plunge into the bed-chamber, the door of which stood three parts open; and lights were burning there. Cicely made a gesture as if bidding him proceed thither, and she would follow. Full of rapture—forgetting also the letter which lay upon the table—Clifford hastened into the chamber, Cicely being close behind him. The moment they had both crossed the threshold, she snatched up the pistol which she had left ready to be thus grasped: she closed the door, and placed

her back against it. At the same moment there was a rustling of the bed draperies; and forth emerged an individual who at the first glance struck Theodore to be some stripling of sixteen or seventeen. But the light of the tapers flashed on the pistol which this individual likewise carried; and at another glance hastily flung upon the youthful countenance, Theodore recognised Josephine Hardress!

"Ah!" he ejaculated, as the sudden idea of treachery now smote him—or at least what *he* deemed to be treachery: then perceiving that Cicely was also armed, he exclaimed, "Good heavens! you would not murder me?"

"Villain!" cried Josephine, presenting the pistol at his head: "down upon your knees to implore your wretched life!"

"And to surrender up the packet of letters which he has about him!" exclaimed Cicely. "Oh, despicable, contemptible creature that you are!—did your silly vanity induce you to believe that you were so strong in your fascinations and I so weak in my principles, as to ensure you an easy conquest after the acquaintance of but a few days?"

"It is all very fine, ladies," said Clifford, endeavouring to put a good face upon the matter; "but I am not to be thus duped!—and if you drive me to those extremes which may create a disturbance, you will only have yourselves to thank for such a disagreeable result."

"Fool that you must be!" exclaimed Josephine; "as great an idiot as you are a villain! to suppose that we should not have provided against all contingencies! This chamber was selected for the purpose. It is remote from that part of the house where the domestics now are: no sound can penetrate beyond its walls—and the report of firearms would not be heard out of doors! Ah, it is no longer a weak woman with whom you have to deal! Look upon me as a man!—for by heaven, I possess the spirit of one—and this garb does not in that sense belie me!"

It might have at first seemed to the reader a mere silly and puerile idea for Josephine to dress herself up in masculine apparel for the proceeding in which she was now engaged; but the calculation which had suggested that course was founded on a knowledge of Theodore's character. Like all villains of the mean and despicable stamp, he was more or less a coward; and the presence of that injured girl, apparelled as a man, impressed him with the conviction that it was likewise a man's stern and desperate energy which was inspiring her. Her features, which were wont to be so soft and passively interesting in their expression, indicated a stern resoluteness: her face was pale—but her lips quivered not—and her eyes were riveted vindictively upon the young man. She held the pistol levelled at his head; and as he glanced aside, he beheld Cicely at the door in an equally menacing attitude.

"Good heavens, they will murder me!" he thought within himself: and then in an audible tone he faltered forth, "What—what do you intend to do?"

But at that instant the door was violently burst open—Cicely was thrown forward by the fury of the impulse—and Hector Hardress, pale with rage, rushed into the chamber.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE CHALLENGE.

THAT the reader may comprehend the cause of this sudden and unexpected appearance of Cicely's husband, a few words of explanation must be given.

It was perfectly true that he had made an engagement to dine with a couple of friends at his club: but on arriving there he found a note to inform him that some other engagement prevented them from keeping the appointment. He knew that his sister Josephine was to dine with Cicely; and finding no one at the club whose society he particularly coveted, he resolved to return home and take his place at the dinner-table at his own house. On arriving there, he inquired of the lady's-maid where her mistress was?—and he was instantaneously struck by the confusion and bewilderment of the young woman's manner.

"Has my sister come?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir—that is to say—I think so," faltered out the maid; "but I am not quite sure——"

"Well then, I will see for myself," ejaculated Hardress abruptly. "I suppose your mistress is up in her own room?"

"Yes, sir—but—but—she is engaged—Pray don't—I mean you had better not disturb her——"

Hector Hardress regarded the young woman with increased astonishment and suspicion: he hesitated for a moment whether to ask any more questions; but quickly making up his mind, he strode past her and ascended the staircase. The abigail withdrew in terror, wondering how it would all end; for she herself did not rightly understand the purpose for which Miss Hardress had been dressing herself up in men's clothes, or why Mr. Clifford had been so stealthily admitted up into Cicely's boudoir. Of course, however, the maid imagined that some intrigue or love affair was going on; and this was the reason why she was so terrified and confused when questioned by her master.

Meanwhile, as we have said, Hector ascended the staircase: and on tiptoe he drew near to the door of his wife's boudoir. There were strong suspicions in his mind—which was natural enough, considering the perturbed looks and manner of the lady's-maid; and he thought the statement which had been made to him in the morning that his sister Josephine was going to dine with Cicely, might after all have been a mere invention or pretext to throw him the more effectually off his guard.

Hector listened at the door of the boudoir; and the sound of a man's voice met his ears. Ah! then his suspicion was only too correct—and Cicely was a wanton! But who could her paramour be? Hector continued to listen: he did not at once burst into the room to confront the guilty pair, as he believed them to be: he wished to learn particulars—to ascertain, if possible, how long the amour had progressed—in a word he was curious to ascertain the circumstances of his own presumed dishonour. But Ah! the name of his sister Josephine was now mentioned! Surely she was not implicated in any intrigues that were now pro-

gressing? He listened with suspended breath. It was assuredly his wife Cicely's voice which he heard in conversation?—Yes! her well-known voice that was now speaking seriously of some business-matter which had to be discussed, and then changing into the languid, tremulous accents of love.

Hector's ear was now retained motionless at the key-hole; and he soon began to comprehend what the business-matter was which had to be discussed. The person who was there, in the boudoir, was Theodore Clifford!—and Hector knew that there was a time when he had sought his sister Josephine in marriage, but that his suit had been peremptorily rejected by Lord and Lady Mendlesham. Was it possible that at the time to which Hector's recollections thus reverted, Theodore Clifford had accomplished the dishonour of Josephine? Yes, yes! it was but too evident! A bargaining for the return of her letters was progressing in the boudoir; and Cicely was conducting the negotiation. But how was this? Was Clifford Cicely's paramour? No—not as yet; for now something was said which showed Hardress that his wife had only known Clifford for two or three days. But Ah! now that the negotiation was concluded in respect to Josephine's letters, Theodore Clifford was pleading his own cause with Cicely. What would be the result? Would she not now indignantly command him to quit her presence? had she not been hitherto temporising and dissembling in order to gain the point on Josephine's behalf? Every moment Hector expected to hear his wife start up and order the audacious young patrician to quit her presence: but no!—her voice was becoming lower—it sounded tremulous in its tone—and Hardress could no longer catch the sense of the words that were breathed. He strove to peep through the key-hole; but the sofa where Cicely and Theodore Clifford were seated, was in such a position that he could not command a view of it. At length he heard footsteps in the boudoir; and the door of the bed-chamber closed. Ah! then his wife had yielded!—yielded like the veriest wanton to a man whom she had known but a few days!

Hector's blood was boiling; and he resolved to wreak a deadly vengeance upon him whom he now looked upon not merely as the seducer of his sister, but likewise of his wife. He glided along the passage—he traversed the landing—he reached his own dressing-room—and there he provided himself with a brace of loaded pistols. Hastily retracing his way, he again reached the door of the boudoir: he tried it—it was unlocked—and he entered. Three strides brought him to the opposite door—his fingers grasped the handle—he pushed the door forward with desperate violence, for he felt that there was some obstacle on the inner side—and he burst into the chamber.

It was at this point that the preceding chapter closed; and we may thence resume the thread of our narrative. A very different spectacle from what he had anticipated, burst upon the eyes of Hector Hardress. Instead of discovering his wife embraced in the arms of a paramour, he found that he had hurled her forward from the door; and at the first glance he beheld, as he thought, two persons of the other sex with her. An ejaculation of bewilderment burst from his lips. He



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at once recognised Theodore Clifford: but the other individual in male costume was hurrying behind the bed curtain.

"Make no disturbance, Hector, for heaven's sake!" exclaimed Cicely, as she quickly sprang up to her feet from the carpet on which she had been violently thrown. "As for you, faint-hearted one——"

But here interrupting herself, Cicely advanced towards the bed-draperies; and Josephine, rushing forth, threw her arms about the neck of her sister-in-law—clinging to her as if for protection against the probable ire of her brother.

"Ah! by heaven, this is too much!" ejaculated Hurdress. "What! in my very presence?"—and at the same time the sharp click of a pistol was heard.

"Stop! it is your sister!" said Theodore Clifford, who was a prey to an excruciating degree of excitement.

"My sister?" ejaculated Hector. "Villain!" he added, in a loud and threatening voice, "she is the victim of your treachery!"

"Ah! then he *does* indeed know all!" shrieked forth Josephine; and disengaging her arms from about the neck of Cicely, she flew to embrace her brother.

"Tell me the meaning of all this?" demanded Hector. "Josephine, compose your feelings! Cicely, speak!"

"It means, Hector," responded his wife, with a lofty dignity, "that you have evidently burst into this chamber in the expectation of finding me with a paramour. But you are mistaken,—and perhaps you will feel your own conduct all the more keenly in its bitterness and meanness, when you learn that all I have been doing was with a view to save the character of your sister!"

"Yes—it is so, Hector! it is so!" exclaimed Josephine. "Cicely is my best friend!"

"Forgive me, Cicely!" said her husband; "but you will admit that the circumstances were suspicious. I listened at the door of the boudoir—I heard only a part——"

"And now you may learn the rest," exclaimed Cicely. "My object was at first to lull this villain"—and she indicated Clifford—"into the most self-complacent confidence, in order that I might obtain the assurance that *all* Josephine's letters were given up, and that I might moreover receive from him a letter which may at any time be produced to stifle the breath of suspicion, to silence the whisper of calumny, or to refute his own words if in a moment of braggart vaunting he should at any time proclaim how well he had once stood in the good graces of the Honourable Miss Hardress."

"And in all these aims you have succeeded, Cicely?" said Hector. "Yes—for I overheard enough——"

"I have succeeded so far that this person's letter lies upon the table of the boudoir," responded Cicely.

"And Josephine's correspondence?" cried Hector impatiently.

"It was to enforce the surrender thereof," rejoined Cicely, "that he was inveigled hither. Two weak women would have been sufficient to accomplish the purpose if you had not burst into the room at the moment: but now that you, the strong man, are here, you may take the business into your own hands!"

"Yes—it is indeed my affair!" ejaculated Hector. "Mr. Clifford," he continued, turning towards this individual, who had been standing pale and agitated at a little distance, "you will at once surrender up the correspondence which so nearly regards my sister's honour—or by heaven! you are a dead man!"

As Hector thus spoke, he presented a pistol at Theodore Clifford's head; while his countenance expressed the sternest resolution. Theodore recoiled in ghastliest horror from the cold muzzle which for an instant touched his very brow, and he faltered forth, "Spare my life! here is the packet!"

It was Josephine's own hand which was now thrust forward to snatch the bundle of letters from her seducer; and she quickly secured them about her person.

"You may take possession of the pocket-book which lies upon the table in the other room, Mr. Clifford," said Cicely, with an ironical laugh; "for you will find that instead of containing bank-notes to the amount of fifteen hundred pounds, its contents are limited to some tradesmen's bills, which you are very welcome to pay if you like!"

Theodore Clifford was now utterly discomfited. Baffled, defeated, and humiliated in every point—exposed as a thorough-paced villain of the meanest, dirtiest, and most cowardly description—he was seized with a kind of rage; and he said in a hoarse voice, "Well, now that you have all done your worst, I suppose you will let me depart?"

"Not yet, sir!" responded Hector sternly. "It is true you are deprived of the means of accomplishing farther mischief, or of making a profitable market by your past villainies; but this is not sufficient! The honour of my sister has been betrayed by you; and I as her brother, demand

satisfaction. Indeed, I not only demand it—but I am in a condition to enforce it. This very evening shall the matter be settled; and either you or I shall be left for dead upon the grass!"

"No, Hector—no!" said Josephine, shudderingly and entreatingly: "risk not your life for my sake!"

"Stand back, girl! stand back!" said Hector sternly. "How have you dared dress yourself in male apparel, if you still retained the spirit of a poor weak woman?"

"Oh, I understand you, Hector!" exclaimed Josephine: "it is my own quarrel—and I will bear my part in it! It is my honour that has been lost—and it shall be avenged! Yes!—ere now I vaulted the manly spirit that had taken possession of me——"

"Enough, Josephine!" interjected her brother; "you shall have an opportunity of exhibiting this spirit as my second in the duel that is about to take place. Mr. Clifford," he continued, again turning towards Theodore, "can you at once despatch a note to some friend requesting his assistance within an hour or two? We will not sleep upon this affair which we have in hand. The moon rises early—the nights are beautiful and starlit—and if you have any fear that we shall not be enabled to take our aim accurately, why, it is but shortening the distance a few paces——"

"Is it really your intention, Mr. Hardress," inquired Theodore Clifford, now assuming as much coolness as he could possibly command, "to force me into a duel this evening?"

"It is my intention," responded Hector firmly. "It is now half-past five o'clock," he continued, looking at his watch; "the full moon is already rising—it will be a novel and exhilarating scene! Come sir! tax your memory—have you no friend residing in this neighbourhood to whom you can transmit a billet containing a few words?"

"You are serious, sir?" said Theodore, who was still excessively pale and very much agitated.

"Most serious!" rejoined Hector. "If you be a coward, I will endeavour to stimulate your flagging sense of honour by a blow;—and if that will not suffice, I will to-morrow post your name in all the clubs and hotels of the West End!"

"By heaven, sir, this is not needed!" ejaculated Theodore. "I will give you the satis action which you demand. Name your place—suffer me to depart hence—and in one hour I will be upon the spot attended by a friend!"

Hector Hardress seemed to hesitate for a few moments whether he should assent to this proposition and suffer Theodore Clifford to escape out of his sight. He had no very high opinion of Clifford's courage; and indeed he more than suspected his opponent only consented to fight through fear of being proclaimed as a coward. Hector knew that this fear might prove even stronger than the actual cowardice itself, and therefore might bring Theodore upon the field; but on the other hand it was equally probable that when once beyond the influence of present coercion, Clifford might flee to the Continent or bury himself elsewhere until the entire matter should be blown over. Therefore Hector soon arrived at a particular conclusion; and he said, "No, Mr. Clifford—it is unnecessary that we should part.

Several reasons render it expedient that we should continue together. In the first place, so long as you remain under my eye, I shall know that satisfaction is within my reach. In the second place, my sister whom you have dishonoured, must become a witness of the obstinism which I purpose to inflict on the author of her dishonour! She will accompany us—but it is not necessary that your second should know that it is a lady in male attire; and I will take care that you have no opportunity of whispering that fact—for if you dare to do so, I will at once blow out your brains, even though I may afterwards hang upon the scaffold!"

"Hector!" ejaculated Josephine, horrified at the idea.

"Silence, girl!" said her brother sternly. "Am I again to remind you that you wear male attire? Mr. Clifford, time is passing. What do you purpose to do?"

"I have a friend living at no great distance hence—at Notting Hill——"

"The very thing!" ejaculated Hector: "it is all in the way to the fields where we shall presently practise our hands with these pretty little rifle-pistols."

"But this friend of mine is very young," continued Clifford,—"not more than nineteen or twenty——"

"My sister does not look so much in her masculine garb," interjected Hardress. "Who is this friend of your's?"

"You do not know him—he has only recently come from abroad with an old uncle—his name is Hailes."

"But can the nephew be fetched away from the uncle at a moment's warning?"

"Yes—at this hour; for they dine early," replied Clifford. "A few lines penned by me, will suffice——"

"Come," said Hector; "it is all as good as settled."

He led the way into the boudoir, and pointed to the table on which the writing materials lay.

"This letter," said Cicely, taking up the one which Theodore Clifford had penned some three-quarters of an hour back, "was written to me, and had therefore better remain in my possession."

"Be it so, my dear Cicely," said her husband: and then he added in a whisper, as he drew her aside, "But it is scarcely likely that it will ever be wanted, for that villain Clifford shall most certainly die!"

"Be not too confident, Hector!" said Cicely, also in a low whisper: "you cannot always rely upon such precision of aim——"

"I tell you, Cicely, that Theodore Clifford shall die!" Hardress emphatically responded, but still in a tone so subdued as to be inaudible except to their two selves. "By his death only will Josephine's secret be safe! All the letters in the world written by such a villain, would not serve as a sufficient guarantee for his silence; and if he chose to vaunt the amour, or on any future occasion to use the secret as a means of extortion, rest assured that poor Josephine's plight would be a piteous one. Yes!—for the world is always more ready to believe than to discredit such tales as these!"

"But why take Josephine with you?" asked Cicely. "Is it not incurring a great risk?—for if Clifford be left dead upon the field, she will have to appear as a witness—or she will be arrested——"

"No—in that case my second takes to flight, and that is all! Who need know that beneath that masculine garb my own sister was concealed?—for the only one who could reveal the secret will have been silenced for ever!"

"But again I ask, why take Josephine at all?" demanded Cicely.

"Why—why," said her husband impatiently. "I have my reasons—you shall know them hereafter. And now accept my thanks, Cicely, for the part which you have borne in this affair—and receive my excuses for the suspicion which I entertained——"

"Enough!" interrupted Cicely: "though I was angry at the time you so abruptly burst into the chamber, yet I must admit that you had ample reason for what you did."

"Have you finished your note, sir?" inquired Hector, now turning towards Theodore Clifford.

"I have," was the response. "You may read it. See!—it merely says that I am waiting in a vehicle at the door, and wish to see Mr. Andrew Hailes immediately."

"That will do," rejoined Hector. "And now, my dear Cicely, go and order that clever maid of your's to have a cab drawn up at the bottom of the garden in as short a time as possible."

Mrs. Hardress accordingly issued from the boudoir; and during the few minutes that her absence lasted a profound silence was observed by the three who remained there. When she came back, she said, "By the time that you are at the end of the garden, the cab will be there."

"Will you agree that my pistols shall be used, sir?" asked Hector. "I promise that you shall take your choice."

Clifford bowed an affirmative; and Hardress proceeded to fetch his pistol-case from his own dressing room. This was but the work of a minute; and on his return to the boudoir, he said, "There is now nothing to detain us;"—then drawing Cicely aside for a few moments, he added in a whisper, "I bid you no serious farewell, because I have no fear as to the result. Yet if anything should happen to me,—remember, Cicely, that since our marriage we have been on good terms—and you have had no reason to complain of me."

"None, Hector," she replied, not without some evidence of emotion: and she was about to add a few more words, when he suddenly pressed her hand and turned away.

The trio—namely, Hector Hardress, his sister Josephine, and Theodore Clifford—descended a private staircase which led into the garden, and which was the one whereby Clifford had been introduced by the abigail to the boudoir. The garden was traversed—the gate at the extremity was reached—and there a cab was found to be in attendance. They entered the vehicle; and Hector Hardress whispered to Theodore Clifford, "Tell the driver where he is to stop to take up Mr. Hailes."

Clifford mentioned the address: the driver

mounted to his box—and the cab drove away. Not a syllable was afterwards spoken until the cab stopped at the expiration of about ten minutes; and as Hector glanced forth from the window, he perceived that the vehicle had halted opposite one of those small but genteel-looking villas which abound in the districts of Bayswater and Notting Hill.

"Now give your directions, sir," said Hardress to Theodore Clifford.

The driver was summoned to the window, and Theodore said, "Knock at the door and deliver this note. You need say nothing."

The cabman did as he was desired; and while he was thus engaged, Hector said in a low tone, "Mr Clifford, I need scarcely remind you of the breath which I ere now held out; and yet I will repeat it in order that there may not be the slightest misunderstanding on your part—for the matter is a very serious one! I shall introduce my sister to Mr. Hailes by some name that may presently strike me; and I warn you not to drop the slightest hint, either purposely or inadvertently, to lead Mr. Hailes to suspect that beneath the garb of a man, a woman is concealed. I have a pistol in my hand, Mr. Clifford; and by the eternal heaven! I swear that if you neglect the warning I have given, I will blow your brains out, let the consequences be what they will to me!"

"You speak as a brother who considers that he has a right to avenge his sister's wrongs," answered Clifford; "and therefore there is an allowance to be made for you."

"Do not put the matter in that light, sir," rejoined Hector sternly: "but keep *this* constantly in your imagination!"

At the same time Theodore Clifford felt something cold, like a circle of iron, press against his cheek; for he was placed on the same seat with Hector Hardress. He knew that this object was the muzzle of a pistol; and he could not help giving vent to an ejaculation of horror.

"Be not frightened! There shall be no intervention on my part," said Hardress quietly. "Do you keep a guard upon yourself—and I will guarantee that this pistol shall not explode accidentally."

This colloquy took place in a far less time than it has occupied us to record it; and Josephine breathed more freely when she heard her brother's concluding words—for she was previously shrinking in mortal terror lest the pistol should go off. Bitterly did she repent of the step which she had taken in dressing herself up in male attire and consenting that Theodore Clifford should be enticed to Cicely's house; but the mischief was done—all the regrets in the world could not alter her position—and though she shuddered to contemplate what might happen, yet she had not the moral courage to speak boldly to her brother and insist upon being suffered to alight from the vehicle and withdraw from any farther connexion with the present proceedings.

Almost immediately after Hector Hardress had ceased speaking to Theodore Clifford, the cabman returned from the front door of the villa; and stepping up to the window of the vehicle, he said, "The message is that Mr. Hailes will come immediately."

Scarcely a couple of minutes elapsed before the young gentleman thus alluded to made his appearance. Both Hector and Josephine—never having seen him before—were naturally curious to discern what sort of a companion they were about to receive in the prosecution of the present business: they therefore fixed their looks upon him as he rapidly advanced from the front door of the villa towards the vehicle. The moon was shining brightly; and its silver beams revealed a slender and genteel figure, a little above the middle height. The countenance was evidently beardless: but then, as Theodore Clifford had stated, Andrew Hailes was little better than a mere boy—his age was only nineteen. Hastily approaching the cab, he looked in, and at once ejaculated in a voice that was pleasant and agreeable enough, "Ah! you have got friends with you, Clifford!"

"A couple of gentlemen on business," responded Theodore. "Step in, Andrew—say not a word—I will explain everything in a few minutes."

The young gentleman accordingly entered the cab; and it was now Hector Hardress who gave the driver instructions as to whither he was to proceed.

"Tell me, my dear Andrew," said Clifford, as the equipage drove onward, "did you succeed in leaving the house without the knowledge of the old gentleman?"

"I was preparing to come out," replied Hailes, "at the very moment when your note was placed in my hand. The old gentleman has fallen fast asleep as usual; and the evening is all before me. But now, Clifford—"

"Permit me to introduce you to the Honourable Hector Hardress," said Theodore. "Mr. Hardress will himself introduce you to the other gentleman."

"Mr. Godolphin," said Hardress, bestowing in this off-hand manner that grand historical name upon his sister Josephine.

Young Hailes bowed with a certain degree of respect to Hector Hardress, and then to the so-called Mr. Godolphin. He was fresh upon town, and was much dazzled and flattered by forming aristocratic acquaintances. He was somewhat vain; and it was the height of his ambition to be the friend and companion of the fashionable men about London. He had the command of plenty of ready money, and was quite willing to suffer Theodore Clifford to dip into his purse, in return for the countenance which he bestowed upon him, and for introducing him to the young patricians of his acquaintance.

Having bowed to Hector Hardress with that half-respectful manner to which we have alluded, Andrew Hailes turned to bestow a similar salutation upon the so-called Mr. Godolphin,—when he was surprised to perceive how young-looking, and even boyish the latter was. Andrew had hitherto experienced some misgivings lest he himself might be too juvenile to be allowed to associate with men about town: but now he thought to himself, "Well, I am sure, if Mr. Godolphin is admitted into their set, I need have no diffidence on the point!"

Meanwhile Hector and Josephine were respectively noticing that young Hailes was an exceedingly good-looking person, with regular features, fine eyes, nice teeth, and a profusion of rich brown

hair. He was dressed with some degree of pretension, and wore a great deal of jewellery; for he had not as yet caught up as it were all the habits of well-bred people. In truth, we may as well observe that he was in some sense a *parvenu*; for his family had belonged to the trading class—though Andrew himself was brought up in that way which the world expresses by the term “as a gentleman.” However, good-looking he assuredly was, and likewise of genteel appearance: his manners could not be cavilled at—his voice was harmonious—and altogether both Hector and Josephine formed a sufficiently agreeable opinion of him.

“And now, my dear Clifford,” said Mr. Hailes, when he had been duly introduced to the Hon. Hector Hardress and the so-called Mr. Godolphin, “will you tell me what we are going to do, and why your billet was penned so mysteriously?”

“The answer is given in a moment,” replied Clifford. “You wish to see a little of life, my dear Andrew—and you have accepted me as your guide and mentor. Well then, I am going to show you a scene from life by the rays of the moon. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred these sort of things take place by the earliest beams of the sun: but in the present instance it is to be otherwise.”

“What on earth can you mean, my dear fellow?” exclaimed Andrew Hailes, with the most unfeigned astonishment. “Surely—But no! it cannot be!”—and yet a suspicion of the actual truth had flitted for an instant through the young gentleman’s brain.

“Ah, I see that you have half guessed it,” observed Clifford. “The fact is, my dear fellow, a duel is to be fought.”

“A duel? Ah, indeed! Well, they are sometimes necessary evils: they cannot always be avoided!”—and it was thus that young Hailes endeavoured to talk like a man of the world upon the subject, and conceal the trepidation of his emotions beneath an exterior of assumed calmness and self-possession. “But am I to understand that you are one of the principals, Clifford?”

“Yes; and Mr. Hardress is the other. Mr. Godolphin will act as friend to Mr. Hardress; and I knew that I might take a liberty with you, my dear Hailes, by naming you as my own second.”

“A true friend is always ready to obey any call,” replied the young man: “but in the present case I could wish that it had been a more agreeable one. However, I shall do my duty. Am I to be made acquainted with the nature of the dispute?”

Clifford knew not precisely what reply to give to this query, but Hector Hardress at once came to his relief, by saying, “Most assuredly, Mr. Hailes, you must be made acquainted with the ground of the dispute. Mr. Clifford has already had the privilege of explaining it to my second; and I therefore will now explain it to you. This mode of proceeding is perhaps somewhat irregular—”

“But if we all agree,” interjected young Hailes, who was now studying to show that he treated the matter in a business-like way, “we impart order and regularity to that which would perhaps other-

wise be somewhat inconsistent with established usages.”

“Well spoken, Mr. Hailes!” said Hardress, affecting to speak in a tone of mingled surprise and admiration. “Why, you are not altogether inexperienced in these sort of affairs—and Mr. Clifford may congratulate himself on having selected so able a second.”

Now, although Andrew Hailes had never seen a duel in his life, and was utterly ignorant of everything pertaining thereto, even to the loading of a pistol,—yet he thought there was no necessity to srow the truth and thus lose the character for a certain degree of worldly experience which Hardress had just given him. He therefore flung out a mysterious hint to the effect “that he was not quite new at this sort of thing;” and then he requested Hector Hardress to proceed.

“In reference to the cause of quarrel,” continued this gentleman, “it may be very briefly explained. Mr. Clifford and I were dining together: we played at cards—a discussion arose—angry words ensued—and then blows were exchanged. Mr. Clifford is here to tell you, Mr. Hailes, whether this statement be strictly correct or not.”

And while Hardress was thus speaking, Theodore Clifford felt the muzzle of the pistol touch the back of his neck, as if it were an iron ring pressed against the flesh; and it sent as strong a shuddering through his form as if it had been the contact of a reptile. He therefore lost no time in saying, “Yes, my dear Hailes—Mr. Hardress has put the matter fairly enough before you.”

“And therefore you see, Mr. Hailes,” continued Hector, “blows have been exchanged—blows, sir!”

“Yes—I see,” said the young gentleman, with a grave business-like tone: “there was no alternative—”

“None!” rejoined Hector, “none but this which has been adopted!”

“May I ask if you two gentlemen were dining alone together?” inquired Hailes; “or if there were any witnesses?”

“My friend Godolphin was dining with us,” replied he; “and he therefore at once proffered his services. Mr. Clifford, while casting about in his mind for an experienced and able friend, fixed his thoughts upon you. We then agreed that the matter should be settled without delay—so we took a cab and drove to your residence.”

Young Hailes was in a strange state of nervousness and excitement. On the one hand he shuddered at the idea of blood being shed and perhaps of life being lost: but on the other hand he felt himself to be of consequence—his vanity was flattered—he was already “somebody”—the confidential friend of young patriots about town! He therefore still did his best to maintain a certain business-like composure; and he said, “Is it not possible, gentlemen, for this unpleasant matter to be arranged amicably, by the intervention of mutual friends—for instance, Mr. Godolphin and myself?”

“Impossible, sir!” exclaimed Hardress sternly. “Blows have been exchanged! Indeed, I know my friend Mr. Godolphin would not for a moment listen—”

“No, not I!” said Josephine, rendering her voice as masculine as possible—and now, as the

supposed Mr. Godolphin spoke for the first time since Hailes had entered the cab, it struck him that he had a very agreeable voice—for Josephine's endeavour to torture it into gruffness had not proved very successful.

There was now a pause, which was not however of very long duration; for it was broken by young Hailes, who inquired, "And pray is it already settled where the hostile encounter is to take place? I think that on these points I ought to address myself to you, sir," he added, turning towards Josephine.

"To me?" she ejaculated, for an instant half-frightened: then quickly recovering herself, she said, "Oh, Ah! the place of meeting! Yes—to be sure——"

"That is always a point to be arranged by the seconds," said young Hailes, with all the dogmatism of an authority.

"To be sure," replied Josephine, somewhat bewildered. "The place of meeting I think you said? Well, sir, it's just along here—at no very great distance—in that direction:" and she jerked her hand so vaguely with respect to any particular point of the compass that young Hailes continued just as wise as ever.

"The place of meeting, Mr. Hailes, will speedily be reached," said Hector; "and I hope that you will not consider it as wanting in respect towards yourself that this point should have been arranged before you entered the cab."

"Oh, I am perfectly well satisfied, Mr. Hardress," answered the young gentleman, delighted by the urbanity of the manners of both his new patrician acquaintances. "And now about the pistols——and on this point I must again refer to this quarter," he added, once more turning to the so-called Mr. Godolphin.

Although the moonlight was beautifully clear, yet it was not so bright as to allow everything to be plainly visible inside the cab; so that the young gentleman failed to observe how pallid suddenly became Josephine's cheek when he breathed the word "pistols." Indeed, she felt as if her heart were altogether sinking within her; and she therefore made a desperate effort to resuscitate her flagging courage.

"The pistols, Mr. Hailes," she said, "are here—somewhere in the cab. That point is agreed upon."

"Then I am perfectly satisfied," ejaculated Andrew Hailes; "and as I judge from what I have already heard that Mr. Hardress was the challenger and Mr. Clifford the challenged, the right of loading the pistols rests with me as Mr. Clifford's second. But since I know nothing about those pistols, I shall of course leave it to you, Mr. Godolphin."

"To me?" ejaculated Josephine, in a voice of such terror that she would have betrayed herself if she had not instantaneously carried the matter off by exclaiming in the roughest tone she could possibly assume, "Oh, yes! of course!—if it be any place—or if you, Mr. Hailes, experience any difficulty——"

"The pistols are already loaded," interposed Hardress, somewhat decisively; for though he did not wish to seem to interfere or dictate too much, yet he saw the absolute necessity of putting an end to the discussion.

The cab now stopped at some point between Notting Hill and Shepherd's Bush; and they all four alighted.

"My good fellow," said Hector, giving a sovereign to the cabman, "you will wait here until our return."

"I hope, gentlemen," said the driver, who had his suspicions in consequence of having caught a glimpse of Hector's pistol-case,—"I hope, gentlemen, there's nothink wrong——"

"Don't trouble yourself about the matter," interrupted Hardress. "Ah, I forgot! I only blinded one eye. Here is something to close the other:"—and he gave the man a second piece of gold.

It was more than sufficient to render the cabman blind, deaf, dumb, or anything else that Hardress might have chosen to make him.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE DUEL.

THE little party of four now moved away from the spot where the cab had halted; and Hardress, tossing towards his sister a cloak which he had brought to conceal the pistol-case, exclaimed, "Godolphin, this is your mantle."

Josephine hastened to put it on; for she not only felt very cold, and her teeth were chattering, but she was likewise afraid that Andrew Hailes would discover her sex by her walk.

The moon was shining brilliantly; and the little party struck across three or four fields, the dew saturating the elegant patent leather boots which they all wore. Not a word was now spoken: each was engaged with his own thoughts. Hardress was most anxious to find an opportunity to whisper a few syllables in the ear of his sister: but he was somewhat at a loss how to manage it. He could not take her aside; for by so doing he would be leaving Clifford and Hailes alone together—and this was the very thing he was most anxious to avoid; for he did not want to afford Theodore the slightest opportunity of revealing the whole truth to his friend Hailes, and thus enlighten the latter not merely on the point of Josephine's dishonour, but likewise as to the fact that Josephine herself was actually present there at that very moment.

How then was Hector to contrive matters so as to be enabled to whisper a word in his sister's ear? For some minutes he was bewildered how to act; and then a thought struck him. They were now about three-quarters of a mile distant from the cab: they had traversed three fields—they were entering the fourth.

"This place will do," said Hector, suddenly,— "at least if Mr. Clifford and the seconds be agreed?"

"For my part, I think we could not choose a better spot," observed Hailes, with an air of importance.

"Good then! we halt here!" said Hardress. "Here are the pistols. See! I open the case upon the ground! Come! let us retreat a little, gentlemen—and let Mr. Clifford choose which of the two weapons he thinks fit."

Thus speaking, Hector pulled his sister and young Hailes a few paces back; while Clifford at once advanced to the pistol-case. Hector's object in keeping Clifford and Hailes apart, was thus gained; and availing himself of the present opportunity, he stepped back another half dozen paces, and with the utmost rapidity drew Josephine with him. What he then did and said, was the work of but a few seconds.

"Take this pistol! thrust it under your cloak! Watch Clifford well! If my shot fails, do you fire that instant. Shoot him! kill him!—or by heaven, Josephine, you are lost!"

The young lady was aghast, and she almost dropped the pistol which she had mechanically clutched; but the eyes of her brother darted a fierce stern look upon her—and she recovered her presence of mind in a moment.

"Perhaps you will measure the ground, Mr. Hailes," exclaimed Hector: "twelve paces right off from the spot where you are standing."

Hailes dropped his handkerchief to mark the starting point; and then he proceeded deliberately to pace forward, counting at each step: "One—two—three——" and so on.

This was another opportunity sought by Hardress to whisper a few more words in the ear of his sister.

"Josephine," he said, "for God's sake do as I have bidden you! Fail not! All this is to save your honour, which otherwise is lost! Kill him!—or by heaven I will kill you! Fear not young Hailes: he is a fool whom we can manage!"

There was a terrible energy in Hector's words and looks; and Josephine caught some of the fierce spirit which animated her brother at the moment. Her brain was, however, too much bewildered to enable her to reason with herself or to deliberate on all the points of this fearful position. She only saw and felt that she had a particular course to adopt; and there was a species of spell which made her resolved to do as she was bidden.

Hector glanced round: Andrew Hailes had measured twelve paces—and Clifford had just chosen a pistol. Hector accordingly hastened to take up the other; and he said in a cold voice, "All is ready, Mr. Clifford: let us place ourselves. Your friend shall give the signal. Neither of us," added Hardress significantly, "require to speak aside to our seconds: for we have no last instructions to give."

Theodore Clifford said not a word: he felt his heart palpitating so violently that he was afraid to trust his voice lest its tremulousness should excite the suspicion that he was a coward. It required all the efforts of which he was capable to sustain an outward air of composure. Hector himself was deceived; and he muttered, "By heaven! the fellow is no coward after all!"

Andrew Hailes was about to accost Theodore Clifford, when Hector tossed him his pocket handkerchief, exclaiming, "There, Mr. Hailes! you are to give the signal. Stand out that way, if you please, sir! But of course you know!—you are not new at these affairs! There! that's right! Take your stand there—count three—and drop the white kerchief."

Josephine was standing near her brother: she did not tremble now—she did not feel cold—her

teeth did not chatter. Nevertheless, she was under a species of consternation, and yet with the fullest and firmest decision of purpose. Her mind was impressed with the necessity that Theodore Clifford must die; and she had an idea that being somehow or another mixed up in this duel, she might take a part therein without becoming liable to the imputation of murder. Such was the thought, but vague and indistinct, which floated in her mind, above the dark purpose which lay at the bottom—like a fleecy cloud over a yawning black pit. For a moment Josephine beheld Hector's eyes fixed with terrible significance upon her; and underneath her cloak she grasped the pistol more tightly, while she kept its muzzle in such a position that she might fire it in an instant. That look thrown upon her by Hector, seemed to fill her mind with a horrible clearness: she beheld in her brother the avenger of her dishonour—and she felt bound to do his bidding!

And it was while she was still in this mood—still under this influence—that Andrew Hailes gave the signal.

"One—two—three:" and the white kerchief was dropped.

The report of a pistol instantaneously followed: it was Clifford's which was thus first fired—and the bullet penetrated clean through Hector's hat. The next instant Hardress fired his own pistol: then it immediately struck young Hailes with a bewildering and astounding effect, that a *third* pistol was fired; but in the twinkling of an eye his thoughts were riveted upon another object; for Clifford sprang at least a couple of feet up into the air and fell back a corpse upon the green, dewy sward.

Hailes bounded towards him: Josephine stood aghast, transfixed to the spot—stupified by a sudden sense of the full magnitude of the deed which she had done. The pistol dropped from her hand: Hector heard it fall upon the grass—and hastily picking it up, he thrust it into his pocket.

"Well done, girl!" he hoarsely muttered. "Well done! your honour is now safe!"

Josephine placed her hand upon her heart, for a pang had shot through it,—a pang as poignant and as excruciating as if Remorse itself, being personified in a subastantal shape, had wielded a trenchant falchion and had smitten that heart in twain without killing the wretched young lady herself with the same blow.

"Courage, Josephine, courage!" said Hector Hardress, in a hoarse quick undertone, while his look was half soothing, half fierce. "Come with me!"

Meanwhile young Andrew Hailes—with ghastliness upon his countenance, horror in his eyes, and stupor in his soul—had sped to the spot where Theodore Clifford lay stretched upon the sward. The youth beheld a dark stain on the shirt-front in the region of the heart: he did not need to touch the body—he knew that his friend was dead!

"All human aid is useless," said Hector, as he approached the spot, followed by Josephine, who went mechanically upon her brother's track.

"Yes!—my God, he is dead!" said young Hailes, who was kneeling down over the corpse: then there was a pause of nearly a minute—and the youth suddenly started up, exclaiming, "Just

heaven! this idea that strikes me! No! But—yes! My God!”

“What in the name of heaven do you mean?” demanded Hardress.

“It struck me—yes!—Oh, yes!—now I remember!” cried Hailes, as the full recollection darted in like vivid lightning upon his brain: “first Clifford’s pistol—then yours, Mr. Hardress—and then instantaneously *a third!*”

“A third?” said Hector coolly. “Ridiculous! It was the echo of the other.”

The youth was struck by the explanation: an immediate revulsion took place in his ideas—he was staggered—he was convinced—and he said, “Yes, it must have been the echo.”

But he did not pause to reflect at the moment—or else he was too little acquainted with scientific principles to comprehend, that there was nothing in those open flat fields to produce a reverberation. Josephine had given a low groan: but her brother at the same instant quickly opened and closed the lid of his pistol-case which he had snatched up; and the wretched girl was at once awakened to a keen sense of the necessity of exercising the utmost control over her feelings.

“Mr. Hardress,” said Hailes, in a tone of profoundest horror, and the white moonlight rendered his face even more ghastly than that of the corpse on which the same argentine beams were playing, “—this is a shocking occurrence! to be alive one moment—to be dead the next!”

“The same chance might have happened to me,” interrupted Hector. “There is no enmity between you and me?”

“Oh, none! none!” exclaimed the youth, accepting the hand that was proffered him. “But now, what are we to do with—” and he glanced towards the corpse.

“You two must fly,” rejoined Hardress. “I will remain to bear the brunt of it!”

“Fly?” echoed Hailes, becoming still more agast than before.

“Fly?” murmured Josephine: and again the lid of the pistol-case was raised and closed with a sudden noise which drowned that piteous expression, at least from the ears of the youth.

“One moment, Mr. Hailes!” said Hector, who maintained a remarkable presence of mind. “I must speak to you both separately. Stay here—I will address myself to Godolphin first.”

He dragged rather than led his sister to such a distance as to be beyond earshot of the young man; and then stopping short, he said, “For heaven’s sake, sustain your courage, Josephine! Your honour is now safe—and nothing can happen to you! You must find your way across the fields—follow yonder lights—they will bring you to Notting Hill. Hasten home to Cicely! You can enter the house by the back-way! No one will ever know that you were mixed up in this affair; and to-morrow all London will believe that there was really a Mr. Godolphin who was my second and who has fled to the Continent. Go! everything now depends upon your presence of mind!”

“But you, Hector?—you, my dear brother?” murmured the agonized girl; “you who have done this on my account?”

“Leave me to manage it,” he quickly rejoined. “I shall give myself up to justice—”

“Justice?” she echoed, ready to sink down with

horror at the very word which seemed to conjure up an array of prisons, tribunals, scaffolds, and all kinds of ghastly objects to her imagination.

“Oh, this is childish!” ejaculated Hector, stamping his foot with impatience. “Fly, I say!—hasten to the villa! Every moment is now precious! I shall surrender myself. It is but sleeping a night in the station-house—to-morrow I give bail before the magistrate—and I am free! Then in six weeks the trial—and I shall be acquitted, or else receive a slight punishment, which will be nothing as the honour of the family is now safe. Fly, therefore!—and for heaven’s sake sustain your courage! You have three miles to walk. Be quick!”

He wrung the hand of his sister, who clung to him in agony for a few moments; and then at his earnest solicitation she sped away.

He remained upon the spot for upwards of a minute, until her receding form disappeared behind the hedge of the adjacent field; and then he sped back to rejoin the youth whom he had left close by the corpse of the murdered man;—for *murdered* Theodore Clifford assuredly was! Hector found young Hailes standing like a statue precisely where they had parted a few minutes back,—his countenance still as ghastly as before—his features rigid!

“Now, Mr. Hailes,” said Hector, “let me give you my advice in your turn. I thought it better that you and Godolphin should depart separately so that there might be the less chance of your capture. And besides, as I thus separately counsel you both whither to go, it makes things all the more safe; because if one be taken, he can confidently and truthfully declare that he knows not what has become of the other.”

“And must I leave England?” asked the young man. “Oh, my poor uncle!”

“It cannot be helped,” interrupted Hardress.

“You must at least leave for a while until the affair be blown over. I will see your uncle presently, and will break the tidings to him. Come, Mr. Hailes—you are a man of the world.”

“True!” said the youth, beginning to lift his head. “But—hut—”

“And then too, you are not altogether unaccustomed to this kind of thing,” proceeded Hector.

“Oh, of course!” said Hailes, still farther recovering himself. “One must make up one’s mind—”

“You will be the talk of the whole town to-morrow,” interjected Hardress, fully comprehending the youth’s silly vanity: “you will be a lion with the ladies—for they all dotingly love everybody who has had anything to do with a duel. Have you money in your pocket?”

“Yes—thirty or forty pounds,” was the reply.

“Good! Then hasten away! Go in that direction for about half-an-hour—don’t lose sight of the lights—and then turn somewhat to the right, and you will gain Notting Hill. Take a cab—go to an hotel in the City—and be off the first thing in the morning by the train to Dover. Or better still—you may save a train to-night! But you will see. Write to me from Boulogne; and I will send you all the news.”

Everything that Hector was doing seemed so friendly, that the youth seized his hand and



pressed it with fervour, at the same time saying, "But you, Mr. Hardress—what course will you take? How can you remove poor Clifford's body, alone and unassisted?"

"Unassisted?" repeated Hector, as if in surprise. "Why, there is the surgeon——"

"The surgeon!" said Hailes, gazing around him in astonishment.

"Yes—to be sure!" rejoined Hardress, as if he himself were amazed at the question. "Do you think we would have fought a duel without having a medical man in readiness?"

"Ah! I am glad of that!" ejaculated the youth; "for just now, while you were talking aside with Mr. Godolphin, it struck me that this unfortunate affair would look very much like murder——"

"Tranquillise yourself!" interrupted Hardress: "everything was done formally and properly. The surgeon is there waiting my signal——"

No. 53.—AGNES

"Where?" inquired the youth, straining his eyes in every direction.

"Where? Why, there!" exclaimed Hardress; "over by yonder hedge. Do you not see him?"

"Ah, I think I do now!" said Hailes: and he spoke no wilful untruth, for in the bewilderment of his imagination he really took some stunted tree for a human form. "But why did he not come up——"

"He waited at a distance until he received a signal from me," rejoined Hector; "but as I at once saw that poor Clifford was dead, it was useless to fetch the surgeon to the spot. And now farewell, my young friend. Ah! by the bye," added Hector, as he shook hands with the youth, "if you should happen to be taken, mind that you *did* see the surgeon!—mind that you *did* see him!" he repeated, fixing his eyes significantly upon Andrew's countenance: "or else, remember that it will be the gibbet for both of us!"

"My God!" said the youth, scarcely understanding what all this meant—scarcely knowing what to think: and he turned his straining eyes again in the direction of the stunted tree.

But there was a dizziness over his sight—objects that were really stationary seemed to move—and he actually fancied that he beheld a human form walking along by the side of the hedge in the distance.

"Yes, yes! I see him!" he said. "A man dressed in black——"

"The same," rejoined Hardress. "And now away with you!"

There was another hearty shaking of hands; and then off sped Andrew Hailes in the direction which Hector Hardress had pointed out. Again did the latter wait until the form was disappearing in the distance; and then he hastened off across the fields towards the bye-lane where he had left the cab,—saying to himself, "All precautions which human foresight could take, have been adopted, except one! By heaven! it was a good shot on Josephine's part! Her skillless random firing was better than my practised hand. And yet how often is this the case!"

He sped onward; and in a short time he reached the cab, which had been waiting nearly an hour. The driver was surprised and alarmed at beholding only one of the four persons returning; and he exclaimed, "What has happened, sir?"

"Just what you suspected, my good fellow," was the response. "A duel."

"Any one killed, sir? or hurt?" cried the man. "I hope not!"

"You at least can get into no trouble," ejaculated Hector; "and I shall have to add a couple more guineas to those already given. In plain terms, I have killed my opponent. The seconds and the surgeon have fled——"

"Ah! this is a bad job!" exclaimed the driver. "But the surgeon——"

"He did not come with us—you did not bring him—he arrived by some other means. And now drive through the fields—follow me—I will go forward to open the gates. We must take up the body."

"Well," said the man, as he mounted his box, "four guineas ain't a bad fare: but I could have wished to have taken you all four safe home again. And what do you mean to do, sir?"

"Surrender myself up to justice," rejoined Hector.

He led the way through the fields, the cab following. The fatal spot was reached; and the body was placed in the vehicle. Hector then ascended the box, and took his seat by the side of the driver,—which being done, the cab proceeded rapidly in the direction of London. As it passed through Notting Hill, Hector said, as if quite in a casual manner, "We will just stop for a moment at the surgeon's; and I will see if he is returned home—or if like a fool he has fled."

"Where shall I stop, sir?" asked the cabman. "At the house with that coloured lamp yonder," responded Hardress—"at Mr. Gilmore's."

The cab stopped accordingly: Hector leaped down and entered the surgery. Mr. Gilmore was there: Hardress conversed with him for about ten minutes; and before they parted, a roll of bank-

notes was transferred from Hector's pocket book to the surgeon's purse. Hector then took his leave; and as he reascended to the box, he said in an off-hand way to the driver, "It's all right: the doctor has got home safe. I did not think after all that he would have been such a fool as to run away; for in these cases no harm ever befalls the medical man."—And then he mentally ejaculated, "And now the last remaining precaution has been taken!"

"Where am I to drive to next, sir?" asked the cabman.

"First to Mr. Hailes"—where you delivered the note—then to Lord Windermere's," continued Hector,—and then to the station-house."

But we must now return to Andrew Hailes, whom we left fleeing from the fatal spot where his friend Clifford had fallen. The mind of the young man was in a most confused and excited state,—ideas of horror strangely jumbling with others of a silly vanity. He wished to heaven that the tragedy had not occurred—or at least that he had had nothing to do with it; and yet he endeavoured to console himself by the reflection that his name would become famous throughout the fashionable world in connexion with this affair. Yet amidst all the turmoil of his brain there was something which haunted him; and this was the singularly expressive look which Hardress had fixed upon him when he said, "Mind that you did see the surgeon; or else remember that it will be the gibbet for both of us!"

The vague suspicion that there was something wrong on that point was floating in Andrew's mind: but he dared not pause to reflect upon it—no, nor to allow that suspicion to gather strength and power.

He ran on for some while, but almost heedless of the direction which he pursued; and indeed he had forgotten the injunctions Hardress gave him in respect to the way which he was to take. He relaxed his pace—he stopped and looked around him. Then he went on again: he remembered something about being enjoined to keep the lights in view; and he altered his course. Presently he beheld a dark form leaning against a gate: his first impulse was to start off at a tangent and fly in some other direction: but as he again looked towards that shape, he recognised the cloak—and he joyously ejaculated, "It is Godolphin!"

We say joyously, because he was in that state of mind in which the idea of companionship was a consolation and a relief; and he sped towards the gate. The person leaning there turned abruptly round; and Hailes at once cried, "Ah, it is you, Mr. Godolphin!"

Josephine could not speak: she was ready to sink beneath the oppressive weight of dread, horror, and remorse. She had lost her way: she was as utterly miserable as a human creature could possibly be.

"Why are you waiting here?" asked Hailes. "I thought that you intended to fly away as quickly as possible."

Josephine groaned; and she clung to the gate for support.

"For God's sake, tell me what is the matter, Mr. Godolphin!" said Hailes, now terribly alarmed. "Perhaps you think that this is infinitely more serious than Mr. Hardress gave us to understand?"

—or perhaps you do not wish to leave the country? I can assure you I do not!"

"No—it must be dreadful for you!" murmured Josephine; and as there was now a hoarseness in her voice, the natural feminine tones were lost therein. "But let us proceed—we will talk as we go on;" for Josephine was frightened at being alone; the image of the murdered man appeared to haunt her—and she wanted a companion.

"Come then," said Hailes: "we may at least proceed a portion of the way together."

"And you can guide me," said Josephine; "for I am utterly lost in these parts."

"Guide you whither?" asked the youth.

"Oh! I promised to leave a message at Mr. Hardress' house," answered Josephine, recovering her presence of mind, and remembering the part of Mr. Godolphin which she had to play; "and if you can only set me in the right road, I shall be obliged."

"That will I do cheerfully!" exclaimed the youth; "for now I begin to comprehend whereabouts we are. But do you not think, Mr. Godolphin," asked Hailes, as he and his companion walked along together, "that you are running a very great risk? You know what the intention of Mr. Hardress was?—he said he should go and bear the brunt of all the consequences of the fatal occurrence——"

"Yes—I know it," rejoined Josephine: "he has gone to surrender himself up to justice;"—and she could scarcely prevent herself from gasping convulsively.

"Well then, Mr. Godolphin," exclaimed Hailes, "don't you see the fearful danger you will incur by going to Mr. Hardress' house? Suppose that by this time he has surrendered himself at some police-station—or at all events he will have done so long before you can reach his villa——"

"And what then do you apprehend?" asked Josephine, whose thoughts were again falling into such confusion and bewilderment she scarcely knew on what point to settle her reflections.

"Why, what I apprehend is that the police will at once hasten to institute a watch on Mr. Hardress' villa—they will think perhaps that it is very probable one of the seconds may call there——"

"Good heavens! this is indeed only too true!" murmured Josephine: and she mentally ejaculated, "What, in the name of heaven, am I to do?"

Again did her mind obtain a certain clearness; and she strove to look her position calmly and deliberately in the face, so that she might decide how she should act.

"In the first place if I endeavour to return to Cicely," she thought, "I shall stand a chance of being arrested; and then what a frightful exposure! In the second place I dare not proceed in this disguise to Mendlesham House; for what would my father and mother think? and moreover I could not possibly obtain admittance without being seen by a number of the servants! What am I to do? I must find an asylum somewhere, and endeavour to communicate with Cicely as soon as possible to-morrow; so that she may bring me my own apparel and relieve me from this cruel embarrassment. Yes—this is the only course to be adopted! But where can I find an asylum?"

For some minutes Josephine and young Hailes had continued their way in silence,—the former making the reflections which we have just recorded—the latter deliberating on the plan which he himself should pursue. At length the silence was broken by Andrew, who inquired, "Well, Mr. Godolphin, what do you intend to do?"

"I must communicate with Mrs. Hardress either to-night or to-morrow morning," answered Josephine. "I promised Hardress to deliver a particular message to his wife. If I could only find some safe asylum for the night——But do not suffer me to interfere with your arrangements, Mr. Hailes. You must escape!"

"It is not more necessary for me to escape, Mr. Godolphin, than for you," replied the youth; "and I really think that as accident has again thrown us together, we ought not to separate, but should continue to row in the same boat. For my part I do not at all relish the idea of leaving the country. I would sooner run every risk, as Hardress himself is doing;—and perhaps it may not be deemed a piece of selfishness on my part to observe that we, the seconds, have far less to apprehend than Hardress himself, who is the principal. Now, therefore, if he could take the thing as coolly as he did——"

"What do you mean to infer?" inquired Josephine.

"That the more I look into the matter, the more am I resolved to stay in London and watch the progress of events. I know a means by which I could conceal myself——"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Josephine.

"Yes," rejoined Hailes: "and I will conceal you likewise. If you make up your mind to go on the Continent, well and good; but if you wish to communicate first of all with Mrs. Hardress, I will tell you how it is to be done."

"How?" inquired Josephine, eagerly; and all this while, be it borne in mind, she was studying to assume as much as possible the voice of a man, so that Hailes continued utterly unsuspecting of the real truth in reference to her sex.

"I can find you comfortable and secure quarters for the night," said Hailes, in explanation of what he had just been offering; "and in the morning I can find a trustworthy person to carry any message you choose to Mrs. Hardress—or to go and ascertain whether the coast is clear in the neighbourhood of her villa; so that perhaps if you only waited until to-morrow evening, she might either come and call upon you, or you might go and call upon her—that is to say, unless you can accomplish by writing the mission which Hardress confided to you?"

"No," replied Josephine: "I must speak to Mrs. Hardress!—and what is more, I must see her at her own house! Do you—do you really think, Mr. Hailes, that you could conceal me somewhere—until to-morrow evening——"

"I know where we may be accommodated with a couple of bed-rooms," replied Hailes, "and where we may sleep in the utmost security. Neither is the house at any great distance; and if all the police in London came rapping at the door, they would receive such an answer as would send them away entirely off the scent."

"Ah, this would be capital!" said Josephine who now began to see an issue from the embarrass-

ments and difficulties in which but a few minutes back she had found herself placed. "If I accept of this asylum for to-night—and if I remain there quiet all day to-morrow—perhaps to-morrow evening I might venture, after dusk, to call upon Mrs. Hardress?"

"Most assuredly!" ejaculated Hailes. "Hardress will be examined before the magistrate to-morrow—he will declare that the seconds have fled to the Continent—and thus the police will give up hunting after us. In short, my dear Mr. Godolphin, I think it is much better we should do nothing precipitately—at all events, I for one mean to remain tranquil for the present. I shall communicate with my old uncle to-morrow, and see what he can do for me. Come! how is it to be?"

Hailes had all along been speaking in a very kind manner to Josephine; for he thought within himself, "This poor stripling Godolphin is but a mere child in comparison with me; and I myself am little better than a boy! I must do the best I can for him! Besides, I dare say he belongs to a good family—the name has a high aristocratic savour—and I cannot fail in the long run to enlarge my circle of patrician acquaintances."

Josephine reflected for a few moments; and then she said, "You are sure that I shall not be an encumbrance upon you?"

"Not a bit of it!" ejaculated Hailes: "it will give me pleasure to assist you to the utmost of my power."

"And these friends of your's—or whoever they may be," continued Josephine, somewhat diffidently, "will not my presence be putting them to any inconvenience—I mean, do you think that—that—they can dispose of a couple of bed-chambers—separate—all in a moment—without any previous warning?"

"Trust to me!" cried Hailes: "I know how to manage everything as nicely as possible. And now let us quicken our pace; I perfectly understand whereabouts we are. Those tall houses are in the neighbourhood of Norland Square. Now we must pass round at the back—and I will presently show you how to enter a friend's house without making use of the front door."

Josephine, though ready to sink with weariness, collected all her remaining energy and managed to keep pace with young Hailes. In a short time they reached a wall which skirted the gardens at the back of a row of houses, the fronts of which looked upon a street or road diverging from the main route of Notting Hill.

"Here we are," said Hailes. "And now for the storming of the citadel!"

"What do you mean?" inquired Josephine, alike bewildered and alarmed by the phrases he used in respect to gaining admittance into the house of his friends, whoever they were.

"Can you climb a wall?" asked the youth. "You need not be afraid of either savage dog or pistol; and as for the wall itself, it surely is not very high! But stay! I will stoop down. There! Now stand on my back—raise yourself up—spring upon the wall! That's right! Now down with you into the garden!"

All this was done as quickly as the ejaculations themselves burst from the lips of young Hailes: for Josephine saw the necessity of proceeding with

that degree of mingled promptitude and boldness which might prevent her companion from suspecting her sex. Hailes leapt lightly up on the wall, and was quickly by Josephine's side within the boundary.

"So far so good!" he ejaculated in a low tone. "Now let us see what o'clock it is:"—and having consulted his watch, he said, "It is nine o'clock. How the time has slipped away!"

"Are you afraid that your friends may be out?" inquired Josephine,—“or that they are in bed?"

"No, no!" ejaculated Hailes: "but I was just thinking of what Lisetta might possibly be doing at this hour."

"Lisetta?" said Josephine. "That is a singular name! Is it not Italian?"

"Yes," responded Hailes: and then he added with a low laugh, "I daresay you suspected there was a female in the case?—and I can assure you that Lisetta is to be relied upon as you might rely on your own brother or sister!"

"And this Lisetta," said Josephine, "I presume is——" she hesitated, and then she forced herself to add—"your mistress?"

Hailes laughed; and as the back door of the house was now reached, he knocked gently thereat. No one answered the summons: he opened a door, and advanced a few footsteps into a passage where a light stood upon a side-table. At that very moment a door opened; and a young female made her appearance. She has been already introduced to our readers: but if their memory should fail we may refresh them by observing that Lisetta was at one time the confidential lady's-maid of the Marchioness di Mirano at Florence. She had a dark complexion and a superb pair of eyes; but she could not be called either handsome or pretty. She had a look which was interesting when a smile was upon her countenance; but when her features were serious, there was something sinister in her regards. At one time she appeared to be full of mischievous mirth and voluptuousness—at another time to have a serious, fixed and rigid look, as if her mind were intent upon some very important subject. Her figure was finely formed and was rich in its contours: her costume was exceedingly neat—and the dress in which she now appeared, was that which was worn by young ladies of moderate means in her own native land.

"Ah? is it you, Andrew?" she said, in a low voice; and she spoke English tolerably well. "How you frightened me! But you are not alone——"

"No—I have a friend here," replied Hailes: and as he thus spoke he turned round towards Josephine, who was standing upon the threshold of the doorway.

At that very instant it struck Andrew Hailes that he beheld some one look over the wall at the extremity of the garden, and then disappear again, as if he had leaped up for the purpose. Smitten with apprehension, he seized hold of Josephine's cloak and dragged her quickly into the passage, at once closing the door behind her.

"What is the matter?" she asked, also smitten with terror.

"I saw some one look over the wall," responded Hailes; "and I could almost swear that the

moonbeams shone upon the glazed edging of a policeman's hat. Go quick, Lisetta, and see what it means!"

The Italian girl hastened to obey the mandate she had just received: and she passed out into the little garden. On reaching the extremity, she inquired, "Is any one there?"

The head of a policeman was now thrust above the wall; and he said, "It struck me that I saw some one leaping over here just now: but I was at a considerable distance—I was not sure——"

"I wish you would mind your own business," was Lisetta's ready response. "Some one did leap over the wall: but it was not without my knowledge. Will that answer suffice?"

"Quite sufficient, my pretty girl," replied the constable; "and if it's nothing more than that, there's no harm done. Only, don't you see, we officers are obliged to look out; and if we do observe anything suspicious——"

"No doubt," answered Lisetta, "you must do your duty. But pray keep my secret, or I shall lose my character. Take this, and go and regale yourself."

She gave the constable a half-crown piece: he thanked her, assuring her at the same time that he was now perfectly blind to the fact of a person having leapt over the wall. He then disappeared, and Lisetta tripped back into the house, where Hailes and Josephine were anxiously awaiting her in the passage.

"Come in here," she said, opening the door of a little back-parlour where there was no candle, and the moonbeams could only penetrate dimly through the window-draperies.

Hailes and Josephine at once crossed the threshold—the door was closed—and Lisetta said, "Make yourselves easy—the man has gone."

"But was he really a policeman?" inquired Hailes.

"He was," responded Lisetta.

"Good heavens!" murmured Josephine; "we are lost! we shall be arrested!"

"Who is this boy? and what is he so frightened at?" demanded Lisetta. "Tell me what you have been doing, Andrew—though I suppose it is only some harum-scarum game—breaking lamps or wrenching off knockers?"

"It is nothing of the sort, I am sorry to say," replied Hailes. "A duel has been fought, Lisetta and a man killed. But do not ask me for any explanations now. Tell me what said that constable?"

"You are all safe, I will stake my existence!" responded Lisetta. "Fortunately the constable only saw one of you leap the wall. I judged that there was something wrong—I was on my guard—and I have told the constable a tale which completely satisfied him. Do not therefore trouble yourself any further on this point."

"Excellent Lisetta!" ejaculated Hailes, patting the young woman under the chin: "you are ever ready for emergencies, and incomparable at expedients!"

"And now what can I do for you?" asked Lisetta.

"Give us supper in the first instance, and some mulled wine, for we are perished with the cold and our feet are wet with the dew. Then prepare chambers——"

"You must not remain in this room," said Lisetta quickly, as if suddenly struck by an idea. "Come with me! Tread softly!"

"Why? what is the matter?" inquired Hailes; while poor Josephine felt her heart palpitating violently.

"Only that there is an Inspector of Police in the front parlour—but as a guest, mind!—and you have nothing to fear if you act cautiously."

Josephine had scarcely been able to prevent herself from giving utterance to a groan at the announcement relative to the Inspector: but during the past three hours she had so many times experienced the necessity of summoning her fortitude to her aid and maintaining her self-possession, that the task became less and less difficult on each successive occasion. It was therefore with no outward betrayal of emotion that she accompanied Hailes, who was already following Lisetta from the room. The Italian girl, taking the candle in the passage, led the way up a decently carpeted staircase to the second floor; and there she threw open a door leading into a small but neat and comfortable bed-chamber. She at once applied the candle to the firing which was ready laid in the grate; and then she said, "I will now go and fetch you some supper."

Thereupon she quitted the room; but in less than five minutes she returned, laden with the materials for an excellent repast.

"Now, my dear Andrew," she said, "you must make yourself and your friend as comfortable as you can. I cannot revisit you again this evening; but I have brought you everything that I think you will require. You need be under no apprehension for your safety; and the first thing in the morning I shall be ready to do whatsoever I can to serve you."

"You are an excellent girl, Lisetta!" exclaimed Hailes. "And now just one kiss——"

"You remember, Mr. Hailes," said Josephine, in a low quick voice, as she suddenly caught her companion by the arm, "that you promised me a separate apartment?"

"Ah, true! I had forgotten! My dear Lisetta," he continued, turning towards the Italian girl, "you do not fancy that young gentlemen like us can herd together like common people!—and therefore you must furnish us each with a chamber."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the girl. "Madame has guests, and every room will be occupied."

"Then I must abandon this one totally and entirely to my friend here," resumed Hailes; "and you, my sweet Lisetta, must receive me in your own bower of love——"

"That also is impossible!" interrupted the Italian girl. "No! you really must put up with these narrow accommodations for once. For security's sake I shall lock your door and take away the key. Good night."

Josephine started up from her chair; she was about to give vent to some ejaculation proclaiming the impossibility of her being locked in all night with Andrew Hailes; but she suddenly recollected all the perils which environed her—how a policeman had looked over the wall, and how an Inspector was in the front parlour down-stairs; so that she sank back again upon the seat without speaking a word; and as she heard the key turning in

the lock, Andrew Hailes exclaimed with a laugh, "Lisotta is as careful of our safety as we ourselves could be! At all events she is resolved that I shall not steal forth presently and find my way to her chamber!"

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE GENTLEMAN IN BLACK.

It was on the day following the memorable incidents which we have been relating in the last few chapters, and between the hour of noon and one o'clock, that Mr. and Mrs. Timperley were engaged in shopping at the West End. They were not using their carriage on the present occasion; they were on foot—and Mrs. Timperley leant upon her husband's arm. Indeed, they were taking a walk together; and the lady was availing herself of the opportunity to induce the gentleman to make divers purchases, against which he offered no objection, for he was in a particularly good humour on the present occasion.

"Well, Mr. Timperley," said his wife, as they walked slowly along a fashionable street, looking in at the shop-windows, "it is quite a pleasure to get you out like this; for I am sure that we are so little together in the day-time—you are always so closely attending to your business——"

"And if I had not attended closely to it, Mrs. Timperley," replied her husband, "I should not now find myself able to gratify all your whims and wants—which I am sure I am doing with pleasure: much less should I have been able to give Cicely a dowry of thirty thousand pounds a twelvemonth ago."

"Well, it was very generous of you, Mr. Timperley," said his wife; "and I wondered that you should have displayed such liberality. I don't mean to say, you know, that I think you illiberal—but I fancied you liked your money a *little* too much——"

"My dear, one must be liberal now and then," interrupted Mr. Timperley, with some little degree of curtness. "However, Cicely was a good girl—and we considered it a very good match—and so I did not grudge the thirty thousand pounds. Yet it was a large sum—a very large sum. Ah! only think if that Morton Evelyn was alive now!—what a nice thing I could make of it by telling him where he could find the very certificate which was so much wanted at the time and which could have filled up the gap——"

"Ah, by the bye, talking of that certificate," said Mrs. Timperley, who, as the reader may have perceived, was partially admitted into some of her husband's secrets, but was unacquainted with others, "did you ever find it again? You remember that very shortly after it was brought to you by the old clerk of Bloomdale, you missed it from your office——"

"No, I never found it," replied Mr. Timperley. "It was a strange thing—for I am the last man in the world to lose or mislay papers. But I remember that just about that time our dear Cicely interceded on old Mr. Barrington's behalf, and begged me to give up that document, you know—I think told you about it——"

"Yes—I remember," said Mrs. Timperley.

"Well," continued her husband, "I had to search and hunt everywhere for that document—I turned over quantities of papers—and I suppose that the little certificate must have got mixed up with some of them. But it will doubtless turn up one of these days; though I believe that it is as good as useless—for no doubt Morton Evelyn has long been dead——"

"And if he should happen to make his appearance," said Mrs. Timperley,—"if he *should* happen, I repeat, just for supposition's sake——Do look at that tall gentleman in black, who has just passed us. How he did stare at you!—and what eyes!"

"I didn't notice it, Mrs. Timperley. Doubtless he is some client—and he may wonder that I did not bow. But what were you going to say?"

"Ob, I remember!" ejaculated Mrs. Timperley. "Suppose Morton Evelyn should turn up one of these days—just let us imagine such a thing,—would you not be ready to kill yourself with vexation for having lost that certificate?"

"Why, my dear, how foolish you are!" interjected Mr. Timperley. "I have only just got to write to the parson or the parish clerk at Bloomdale in Warwickshire; and for a certain fee I receive in course of post another copy of the same entry in the register."

"Ah, to be sure! I didn't think of that!" said Mrs. Timperley. "But I do declare, here is the tall gentleman in black again! He has just passed us!—he gave you such a peculiar look from under the broad brim of his hat!"

"Do you mean that tall gentleman who is now looking in at the bookseller's window?" inquired Timperley,—"the one who has his back towards us?"

"Yes—the same," responded Mrs. Timperley. "You should have seen that look!"

"I don't recollect him," observed the lawyer, musing and reflecting. "I can't see his face—but that figure—no! I certainly don't know him! But Ah! what is this? Lord Mendlesham!"

Mrs. Timperley flung her eyes in the direction indicated by her husband; and she beheld Lord Mendlesham making signs, and at the same time leaning half-way out of his carriage window to order his coachman to drive up to the spot where the lawyer was now halting. His lordship was evidently much excited; and the Timperleys wondered what could possibly be the cause.

"Good heavens! have you not heard the news?" demanded the nobleman, as the equipage dashed up to the side of the kerbstone.

"What news?" exclaimed Timperley, who, as well as his wife, experienced a sudden terror.

"But your niece is not ignorant of it!" cried Mendlesham.

"Do, for heaven's sake, speak, my lord!" said Timperley: "you alarm me! What has happened?"

"There has been a duel," replied Mendlesham, "between Hector and a certain Theodore Clifford——"

"A duel?" ejaculated Mr. and Mrs. Timperley, as if in the same breath. "But your lordship's son——"

"Hector is alive! he is unharmed in body—but—"

but—In short, Mr. Timperley, Clifford fell dead upon the field!"

"Ah, well!" said the lawyer, now suddenly regaining his wonted self-possession: "it is a comfort to think that if one of the two were destined to fall, it was Clifford and not Mr. Hardress. That Clifford was a villain!—he seduced and ran away with a young lady I was more or less interested in—a Miss Lister——"

"Yes, yes—I heard of it!" exclaimed Mendlesham. "At one time he aspired to the hand of my daughter—but I would not listen to it——"

"And so he is killed?" said Mr. Timperley. "But what about Hector himself? I beg your lordship's pardon—I meant the Honourable Mr. Hardress. For though he is my nephew," added the lawyer obsequiously, "yet I flatter myself that I never presume——"

"No, no, Mr. Timperley—you do not," ejaculated the nobleman. "But Hector has surrendered himself—he has appeared before the magistrate——"

"Ah, indeed, my lord! that was inconsiderate!" said Mr. Timperley. "He should have consulted either your lordship as his father—or me as an attorney——"

"Well, at all events," interjected Mendlesham, "the mischief is done——and perhaps, after all, Hector adopted the wisest course; for it seems that everything was perfectly fair and straightforward."

"Ah, I am glad of that!" ejaculated Timperley; "though I could not for a moment suppose that Mr. Hardress is capable of acting otherwise. But your lordship seems to know the particulars?"

"The bare outline!" ejaculated the nobleman. "Mr. Gilmore—a surgeon of Notting Hill—came to me just now in a hurry, and told me what had happened. He attended upon the ground——"

"And who were the seconds?" asked Mr. Timperley.

"A Mr. Hailes and a Mr. Godolphin," replied the nobleman. "I don't know either of them——"

"And Lord Windermere—does he as yet know of the catastrophe?"

"It seems that the body of the unfortunate young man was taken to his father's house last evening: but his lordship himself was out of town—he was immediately telegraphed for—but he only arrived this morning."

"And how was it," inquired Timperley, "that your lordship was kept in the dark until just now?"

"Ah! doubtless the fault lay with your niece Cicely," rejoined the nobleman. "In fact I am sure it did: but we must not blame her—for my

daughter Josephine was staying with her, and it appears that Josephine was so dreadfully excited and shocked that Cicely was up with her all night. Josephine told me this herself; for she just now returned home, at the very minute Gilmore was taking his leave."

"Ah! then, poor Cicely had so much upon her mind in one way or another," said the lawyer, "that it is no wonder if she omitted to send a communication to me or her aunt. But where is your lordship going now?"

"The case is over at the police-court," replied Mendlesham; "and Hector is committed for trial. But he is to be bailed. It was Gilmore who came and told me all this——"

"And I presume that your lordship," exclaimed Timperley, "is now going to the police-court——"

"Yes—to give my recognizances for Hector's appearance," rejoined Mendlesham.

"Does he require an additional surety?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes—there must be two," responded the nobleman: "but I sent Gilmore to bid my jeweller hasten to the court for the purpose; or else it would have been opportune that I should thus meet with you.—Drive on!"

In obedience to this ejaculation, the coachman touched the horses with his whip, and the equipage dashed away. Mr. and Mrs. Timperley stood gazing after it, as if by watching the retreating wheels they should thence gain any additional insight into the affair of which they had just received a meagre outline.

"Ought you not to go to the court and see Hector?" at length inquired Mrs. Timperley.

"Well, perhaps I ought. And yet I don't know! If his lordship had wanted me, he would have offered to take me in his carriage."

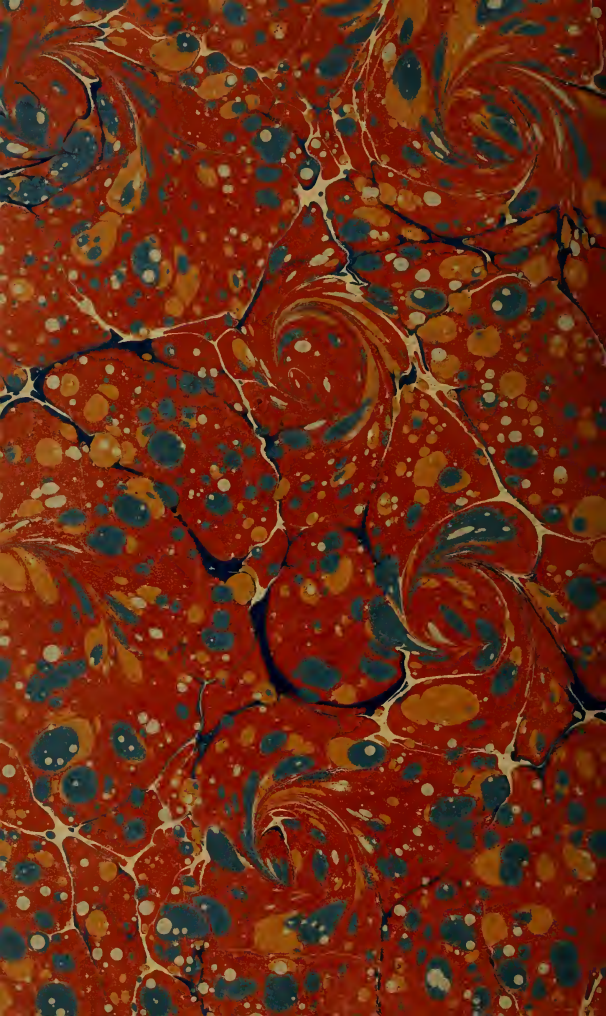
"Ah!" ejaculated Mrs. Timperley: "the gentleman in black again!"

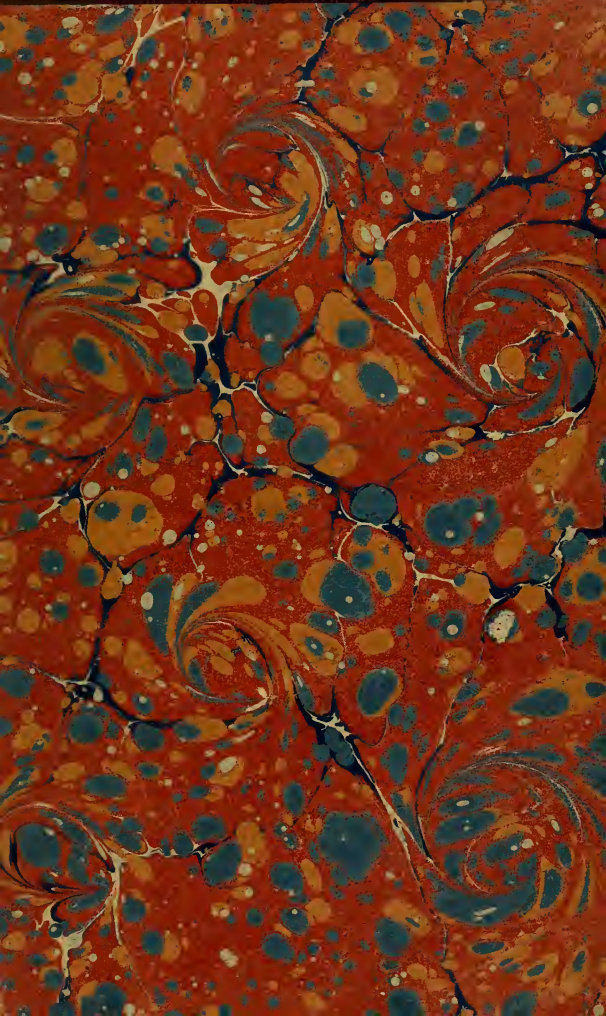
"Where?" demanded her husband.

But there was no need for the lady to give any reply; for scarcely was the question put, when the tall gentleman in black, stepping up at once, confronted the lawyer, on whom he bent a look which made the conscience-stricken man recoil from the recognition which took place with lightning vividness.

"Good heavens! is it possible?" murmured Timperley. "Morton Evelyn!"

"Yes—Morton Evelyn, if you will," responded the deep-toned voice of the gentleman in black. "But you know likewise that I am at last in reality what twenty years ago I falsely thought myself for a fleeting dream-like space!—I am Lord Ormsby!"





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